

The Beat Within

THE BEAT WITHIN • A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF WRITING AND ART FROM THE INSIDE • VOLUME 12.29



Yesterday morning while checking emails, in between edits, we saw the headline that football legend, the man known as "the genius," Bill Walsh, passed away at 75, after a three year battle with leukemia. For most of you reading this, you probably have no idea who Bill Walsh was, and how he played an important role to the San Francisco 49ers lore and San Francisco's sport history, as well as being one of the NFL's most influential people - yes, a hall a famer. Ask your older family members, and if they dig sports particularly football, they'll have a thought on Bill Walsh, or if anything know him as the guy with the white hair.

Bill Walsh, the man responsible for the "West Coast Offense," and the man responsible for leading the Niners to 3 Super Bowl victories is no longer present, he died peacefully at his Woodside home.

The way he spoke to the press. The way his players respected his wisdom and teachings. And even his opponents admired his approach to the game. Lets put it this way, back in the day, everybody wanted to play for Coach Bill Walsh. Every coach that coached under him, for the most part, when they left the team to take on their own head coaching job, be it Mike Shanahan, Mike Holmgren, to his heir George Seifert, who went on to win two more Super Bowls for the Niners, brought his winning approach and ideas to their teams. Plus, the following outstanding coaches in Tony Dungy, Jon Gruden and Brian Billick. Andy Reid, Dennis Green, Marvin Lewis, Steve Mariucci and Jack Del Rio. Walsh's legacy lives on!

We read in an article, that the very special 49er owner, Eddie DeBartolo, who too played a huge role in creating the dynasty of the 49ers in the '80s and '90s said, "You can go through this league and almost every corner of every team is touched by Bill Walsh, from head coaches to coordinators to sons to cousins." This is so true, and all these people give due credit to Bill Walsh too.

As most fans know, Walsh assembled a talented squad that included the greatest quarterback, Joe Montana, who was a third round pick out of Notre Dame. Then there was the greatest wide receiver, Jerry Rice, out of Mississippi Valley State, and the greatest cornerback Ronnie Lott out of USC, and lets not forget the 49ers had the greatest back-up quarterback in the NFL too! Thanks to Bill Walsh, we had yet another hall-a-famer, in the equally competitive Steve Young, who patiently waited in the wings to step in and relieve Joe Montana. Oh sure the press had a field day questioning Walsh, but in the end this incredible leader gave San Francisco one of the greatest rides we ever had, teaching and working with two of the sports' greatest passers, Montana and Young.

Sure fans loved Walsh's offense, but it was his defense that also excited us, from the likes of Lott, Dwight Hicks, Eric Wright, to Fred Dean, Jack "Hacksaw" Reynolds and Charles Haley, whose units dominated the league in the 1980s.

This editor is talking way too much about things that most of you can read in the newspaper or watch on television. What if anything we wanted to state was that the death of Bill Walsh made us think back to a time of innocence and incredible excitement in San Francisco. He inherited a lousy team in the late 1970s and built a winner. We kids would do almost anything to get tickets to go to Candlestick Park to see Bill Walsh and his band of 49ers, and that we did. Remember scalping tickets at the high price of \$25 for the 1981 NFC Championship Game against the Dallas Cowboys. Yes indeed the game that the great Dwight Clark soared so high to catch Montana's pass that most of us in the stadium thought he was throwing out of the end zone, for the winning come from behind touchdown. Oh the place went bonkers. Little did we know this would be the start of a special time in San Francisco, let alone all of sports.

It was a time when San Francisco was not bombarded

with high rents and overpriced homes to buy. A time when most people who lived in San Francisco were born and raised, not as transient. Crack was definitely not an issue. "Dot-com" and Silicon Valley were not even words. Pagers and Cell phones if they were around, you must have been rich. Computer world, yeah right, not even close to what it is today. And the youth violence wasn't anything to lose sleep over. Shhh, this editor should know, he was 18, fresh out of high school and living in city.

Talk about hysteria in the Bay Area, this editor never saw excitement like this, when the 1982 Niners won their first championship. The town was rocking, near riots, like it has never rocked. We remember everybody hundreds of thousands ditched school and work to go to the parade on Market Street to celebrate the championship. It was so massive; all of Market Street was filled with people that the parade of Niners needed to take a detour to get to the City Hall celebration.

Not sure if there is any lesson or moral to this rant of a tribute to the great Bill Walsh, except the man was a great sports leader, a great sports mind that had the respect from the fans, to those who had no clue of the sport. RIP Bill Walsh you have a place in our hearts. Thanks for the memories, 'cause to this day, when football conversations come up and 49er trivia, it is your era that is spoken about with joy.

OK, lets get to the 12.29 topics at hand! These are the topics that are discussed prior to the writing that fills this week's pages.

Our first topic, "Equal Justice Under Law" - These are the words carved in stone above the entrance to the highest court in the United States, the Supreme Court. The U.S. Constitution also guarantees that "No State... shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (14th Amendment). In other words, every state must apply the laws equally to all its citizens. Do you believe the United States has kept this promise? Do you believe the law treats all of us equally? Whether you answer yes or no, give us specific examples from your own experience and knowledge, or from things you've seen in the news. Tell us what you think, but give us the specific reasons for your opinion.

The second topic, "Them days" - There are good days, bad days and regular old days that are simply uneventful. This week we want you to describe for us the happiest and/or the worst day of your life. In your writing, take us to that day, and tell us in detail what happened, and why that made it the best or the worst.

The third topic, "Pros and Cons" - Even if you do not in a gang or see yourself as a criminal, you definitely have an opinion, so we want to hear your thoughts on the following two questions... What are the advantages of being in a gang or being a criminal? Then tell us what are the drawbacks of being in a gang or being a criminal?

Lastly, "This Morning" - I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window, so I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door, opened my door and ...

As usual there is plenty of great stuff to read from our weekly workshops writings, to the special entries in the front of this beautiful issue and of course the BWOs that are the backbone to each and every issue we put out. We hope you like!

This issue goes out to our wonderful and long-time committed colleague Allan Tinker, who lost his father the other day. We never met his dad, but we do know his dad brought into this world a wonderful loving person in Allan, and that we are thankful. We can't say it enough, we love and respect you Allan and we send our prayers and good thoughts to you and your family during this time of mourning.

Also, we send prayers love and respect to Mario Navauro and his family who are recovering from a terrible tragedy. See you next week Beat editorial note readers.

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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The Beat Without 60



Drugs Sex And Violence

Once there was a little girl who was about three or four years old. She was very beautiful and bright for her age. Her name was Kasey.

She had spent the night at her aunt and uncle's house for the weekend and her uncle had taken advantage of her. He told the girl that she was not to tell anyone about what they did and it'll be their little secret. Kasey didn't say a word only because she was scared that her uncle was going to do something bad to her.

Later on she found out that he did the same thing to her sister who was only seven at the time and didn't stop until her mother found out.

At the same time when her mother confronted her uncle about what he did, he denied it and said the girl was lying about it.

From there on Kasey who was only four, didn't tell anyone, only because no one had believed her sister when she told. Kasey went on thinking and crying and praying that her uncle would just die for doing what he did to her and her sister. She felt that it was all her fault for what he did to her. She couldn't bear to look at her self in the mirror because of how disgusted she was of herself.

When Kasey became a young teen she didn't know what to do or how to act. She was becoming a teenager so fast in her eyes that there was nothing but peer pressure around her. She had friends that were her age and who were sexually active and in the fast lane.

Her friends were always running away from home doing drugs and drinkin and she wanted to be apart of it. She decided that having fun was more important in life then going to school and getting an education.

After she turned fourteen she had ran away from home with a friend that was in the fast lane. They left and went to Sacramento.

Kasey's friend who was fifteen years old was trying to peer pressure her to do things that she really didn't want to do.

Kasey and her friend got messed up one night while they were in Sacramento and were at a gas station like around midnight while waiting for a ride.

A group of men who looked like they were around twenty-one and up had pulled up and were trying to get the girls in the car. The girls had refused until the cute one had come out and was trying to talk to Kasey. Kasey knew it was wrong, but at the time she was out of her mind and didn't care so she and her friend had jumped in the car with the other men and drove

From The Beat: We are thrilled to include in this fabulous issue part two of the three-part series of writings from the powerful girls in Unit G2 in Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. This is all made possible thanks to the Osborne School Department, particularly their teacher, Ms. Bernadette Neizvestny. The young women known in this special section as the "Strong And Open Minded," give us readers plenty to read as they shed plenty of light on their world. With that said, lets give the floor to the young writes who are "Strong And Open Minded!"

off.

Kasey was talking to a guy named De'lashawn who was nineteen-years-old, while the other men were older. She and De'lashawn hit it off and everything was cool with them until he tried to put her on the track. Then and there Kasey knew that this ninja got her screwed up, real talk.

She told her friend what De'lashawn was trying to do to her and all her friend said was, "so what he look good I would do it if I was you."

Kasey was disgusted by what her friend said and called her mom and told her where she was so she can come and get her. Kasey didn't tell her mom everything that was going on, but her mom knew that she wasn't a virgin and also she was doing some type of drugs, but didn't know what kind.

When Kasey came back to San Jose she was back in school doing what she was supposed to, until she met a guy named Domo.

Domo was 19 years old and was from Oakland.

Kasey and Domo were going out for about four months until he got locked up. He only did like three weeks and got out. Kasey and Domo were like Bonnie and Clyde. They were grinding together, helping each other out, getting locked up for one another, until one night Kasey found out that Domo had another girlfriend before her and didn't know.

Kasey confronted Domo and told him that he was going to have to choose up, it was either Kasey or Cecily and he choose to mess with Kasey. Kasey was really happy, but later on in there relationship there was always fighting and arguing and one time when Kasey got locked up for Domo, she had heard he was cheating on her with Cecily. Kasey was mad but so in love with him that when he had denied it she stayed with him. When she got out she was put on E.M.P for 45 days and had her boyfriend come over to finally meet her parents and brother and sisters.

Kasey's parents didn't want to meet Domo because how he had their daughter out on the streets grinding and getting locked up for something that she didn't do. (To be continued.)

-Kimberly

Street Life

What up Beat! This is Tk that one and only up in honors holding it down up in this caca place.

Hella people talk street life, is gangs, drugs, violence, drama.

They always talk about making a change in life and how they are tired of being in the system, and the streets. So stay out of it!

But trying to stay outta either one aint that easy to stay out of.

Yeah its hella fun being on the outs with your homies smoking a blunt and trying to get in a gang 'cause your homies are. Some teens walk around yelling out gang signs like, "crip cuzz" or "what's up blood?" Or it's always this one phrase every gang member says "ey you bang?"

We're always running around on weekdays after school looking for bomb or trying to get a dollar for a blunt wrap.

We don't realized what we have until we lose it.

Yeah it's our homies that are there with us when we are about to squab 'cause they got our back, or they're with us when we check someone 'cause they got our backs. Or if you wanted to kick it 'cause you have money for some 40's and a dub, they gon' be there 'cause they yo' homie and they got our backs. Just because they homies and they there through all that drama and fun, don't mean if you get locked up or if you get caught they going to be there. Who will then? Your family!

After you get into a fight or when your doing drugs who are you going home to? Your family! Who's making dinner and doing your

laundry while you're out not thinking of her? Your mom...

Who's walking back and fourth and in and out of your house worrying about you because its 9pm, and you got out like at two from school? Your dad... Who will sit there and cry with you when you're about something or when you need to talk? Your brother or sister! Am I right?

None of your homies are there when you're locked up, none of the faces that you seen when you was committing the crime show up at court, or you don't hear from them. Yeah, they probably writing to you, but probably about supposedly them missing you or they probably trying to peer pressure someone else!

So everyone in here, stop talking more on your homies and start more on your family! 'Cause those homies on the outs aint even worried about you, 'cause they got another cat they trying to lock up.

Don't get me wrong I understand that homies for some of you are family because you been abandoned by your own family, your own flesh and blood because you're on drugs or you just don't give a living shhh about yourself. And doing drugs is a sign of "I like being on the streets".

Your family loves you, your homies "care", but the choice you make, be wise about it 'cause some homies turn they back soon and leave you cold out laughing at you. Unlike family who will nourish this care and love you 'till the end.

So to all let this be a lesson to be learned, 'cause it'll get you somewhere.

-Tk

Lady Sav Can't Stop Won't Stop

There once was a little girl who was 12 years old. She was living the fast lanes trying to grow up fast. She came from a broken up family. Her mom was a fiend always shooting up. Her pops always in and out of jail. Her older sister got raped and then left for dead. Her older brother caught up in the game, living the street life, straight smoking weed all day trying to escape the hurt that lies within the family.

The little girl has a boyfriend that's eighteen going on nineteen years old. Trying to sell the little girls body for thirty a night. The little girl starts prostituting, doing it big for ninja.

The girl starts to realize this aint the life for her. She escapes and try's to find a place, knowing she has no family to go back to, she finds her brother and gets jumped in, now she's a very young teen gang bangin' hella hard putting in work.

She starts grinding downtown slanging everything you could think of. She starts popping pills, and smoking shhh. She starts stacking hella bank now she thinks she has everything she need and wants. She so caught up in the game and the street life that her reputation is well known around.

She gets locked up for putting in work, now she's serving 8 months in juvenile hall. She meets a lot of females she's cool with and catches them on the outs. Now there is a group of young girls grinding for her making paper day and night. She's always on her toes, always on her grind, known for getting what she wants.

She's fifteen years old now known as Lady Sav. Doing it big in the streets, she meets this guy named Elisha from the same set she's from. He's a new recruit that just got jumped in like two weeks ago. They start dating on the low so her big brother doesn't know what's up. Elisha starts getting big headed and starts being abusive towards Lady Sav. She starts thinking she's doing something wrong and she starts to blame herself and she can't let go of him because she in love with him.

She ends up being two months pregnant and tells

Elisha, but he thinks the kid is not his. He accuses her of cheating because she's always out and making her money. They start arguing and he slaps her, she hits him back and busted his lip, and he ends up socking her up 'till she falls down. Then he started kicking her and he just threw a towel and said, "go clean up you look ugly bitch!" She stayed on the floor crying.

She called her up her girl that grinds with her to scoop her up. She ends up going to the hospital and finds out that she lost the baby.

Her friend slipped and told Lady Sav's brother who is in the same set as Elisha what was up. Her older brother got hella heated and got his boys and bombs on Elisha, now he's out of the set for messin with his lil sister.

Lady Sav is sixteen years old now, she's flying solo messing with hella dudes trying to find love. Her friends realize what's going on and tell her she shouldn't be looking for love and that love will come to you when it's the right, just live life one day at a time. They ended up clubbing, bombing on other females together and just doing everything together.

One day Lady Sav's brother says to meet him up at the spot because they feeling the need to bomb on some ninjas, so they get strapped up and shhh pops off. It's a big rumble between the two gangs and her friend gets stabbed a couple of times and died that night. Lady Sav and the rest of the set showed mad love and respect towards her friend because she was a down ass homegirl that loved putting in work.

Lady Sav saw that life was too short and that you can die any minute that you shouldn't be trippin' off your enemies but enjoy life while you can, she noticed life is precious but at the same time she couldn't leave the gang life. She was in it 'till the day she dies. She said she couldn't leave her brother and all her homies behind like that, plus she loved making hella money by grinding and what not. She's was going to be a gangsta till the end, and that's the path she chose. She said she was not going to change for no one. RIP Lady Sav.

-Wise And Open Minded, Lady Nono

I'm Gonna Do What I Got To Do

What's sup with you Beat? How you living that lavish?

Honestly no matter what anybody and everybody say I'm going to do what I do. I got everybody and they mama telling me to do this and do that when they need to shut the hell up and let me live my life.

Everyone is going to live their life the way they want.

I smoke weed, pop pills, and drink every now and then you feel me? I wake up smoking and go to sleep smoking but at the same time I'm going to school and working so why the hell is everyone on my back for? I'm 'bout to be class of '09 you know, and finishing school at the age of 18! I'm walking the stage no matter what and that's real talk! That's me, smoking, popping pills, and drinking every now and then, and this isn't messing me up in school, so why the hell should I stop?

As you can see I'm going to keep on doing what I do and still get somewhere in life. I'm going to have my diploma in my right hand, a blunt in the left with two more pills in my system. I'm going to be on one, and that's real talk, I don't have no shame in my game so screw everyone who be trying to put yo' girl down. I'm going to do it big wit' a blunt in my hand point blank.

-Kimberly

An Email 07/31/07

Yes, I saw The Beat (issue 12.28)! The girls would not let me begin class without talking about it. They are all so happy and I am stoked! I think what you and your staff are doing with this publication is awesome. It gives a voice to so many who either need to be heard or hear it for themselves. Keep at it!

Yeah, so thanks for the section. It rocks! The girls were very happy to see their stuff and to see my intro. My mom even wants a copy. So, we are going to start working on another piece for you all this week and this time I am going to have them type on my laptop so that way I can send to you electronically, maybe ease the torture of re-typing submissions, ya know?

I can't thank you enough for making this project happen. Written expression and reflecting on positive lessons with these girls is the core of my educational philosophy and your magazine helps to see those pieces come to life. It sends such a positive message all around. Thank you thank you thank you.

- Bernadette

Las Vegas Story

All my life I have been pushed around to different members of my family. Me and my brother and my sister was like orphans. We was born in Las Vegas, Nevada, my mom and dad was both on drugs. My dude used the needle and my mom smoked crack. It affected my family in a very bad way.

We had to go stay with my auntie when we were about six and seven years old. Then we had to move to California with my grandma. She took good care of us. We stated there with my cousins. They were about the same age as us.

Years went by and we grew up. My grandma used to take us fishing for a long time in my life I felt like the only people who loved me was my grandma and my brother and sister and sometimes my cousins. Me and my brother are very close. Soon after we moved back with my mom and dad they were doing good for a short period of time and then had a relapse and started using drugs again. Then me and my brother went to Child Haven, where we stayed for like a week. Then my mom came and got us, and then we went to stay with her. She stayed in LV, my big sister lives there with her and my little brother did too. She was taking care of it. it was hard for her but she did it. About a year later when was getting ready to move to Virginia.

She was going to take all of us, but I did not want to go so she went me back to my dad.

-Hard Life Youngster

Soon after we moved back with my mom and dad they were doing good for a short period of time and then had a relapse and started using drugs again.

When I See My Mommy

Her eyes fill with tears. I know that it hurts her to see me in here.

Every time I get locked up I know it stabs her in the heart I know she cares, I see it in her eyes, but there's one thing mommy doesn't know about me, that I'm scared, lonely and I feel really lost. I want to tell her but I'm too scared to tell her.

I know I say hurtful things, but I don't mean them.

I know daddy walked out on his own.

I always tell her I'm done with the game but when I try to leave it pulls me back in.

When I see my mommy her eyes are always filled up with tears. My mommy always thinks she gonna get a call tellin' her I'm dead, and my mommy's eyes fill with more tears.

I want my mommy to know I'm sorry, and I don't want her to cry. My mommy means the world to me, I know it hurts her to see me in here. I'm really sorry mommy please forgive me.

I don't want you to cry, mommy.

I'll be home and I'm gonna make sure the game is gone. But don't think I don't see the tears in your eyes. I notice everything about you.

You are my mom and best friend.

-Carmen

From The Beat: In late November 2006, The Beat Within was invited to a JDAI Juvenile Justice Conference in New Orleans, LA. Several Beat colleagues presented before a packed audience, sharing the story of The Beat Within. One person in that audience was Steven Graham, a probation officer from Las Vegas, Nevada who was inspired enough by The Beat Within message to invite our program out to meet some of the minors in his care, with the desire to implement our program in his center. Like we said last week, there was nothing "minor" about these young writers at all. Major talent, major heart, and a major appreciation for the publication in their hands. We are very proud to publish the last installment of pieces they wrote during our visit, and we are hoping to see the young voices from Las Vegas in future The Beat Within publications! We learned so much and hope this is truly the beginning of more to come from our friends in Clark County aka Las Vegas, Nevada.

Turning Tricks to Feed My Family

I became an adult and started having sex at the age of nine. I got into the game at the age of thirteen. My parents stayed away. And my sisters need me.

Someone came to me one day while I was just figuring out some way and was like "You're fifteen working at a messed up job trying to feed you and yours. Why not come and mess with me and make a G or more a day?" I

It sounded good, and it was good. I needed the money that same day. My sisters were going hungry for two days. We had no one to turn to. So I had to get up and go to the block.

He made everything better in each and every way. He beat me but guess what...Mine's had what they needed each and every day.

I gave myself to the game so my sister can be taken care of till the end of days. So no I'm not ashamed of the decisions I have made I will give up anything, just to see them smile once every day.

Today this lady came to my Juvenile Detention center and told me that I can feed my sisters and me by getting a job, going to school, and getting a scholarship. That's bullshh! My sisters have to eat all day, wash every day. They can't wait till two weeks passed, till I get paid to eat or to be taken care of.

So in order for my sisters to have their necessities every day. I have to do what I got to do no/Even if it means getting out here and dealing with pimps and tricks.

It's nothing because my sisters are being taken care of every day. They have what they need. They don't have to go without.

A minimum wage job isn't gon' feed them every day. But if I'm making a gee a day, then they can. Yeah, I'm locked up, but I have worked enough so that while I'm locked up they can be taken care of.

I have to do what I do.

The game feeds mine and mines.

The game is my addiction. I need it to survive. No matter what.

-Chamitze

Staff

Some staff treat kids mean, just because they got the power. They will do stuff like say we can't go to rec, just because they know we will catch an attitude and that gives them the reason to lock us in our room.

Some staff will keep us in our room longer than we should. That makes a lot of kids angry. I know we are in detention for a reason, but the reason is to learn from our mistakes, not to be bossed around. Just because it make them feel like they got all the power in the world.

If I were a staff member, I would talk to the kids; give them advice on how to stay out of here. I would understand their pain and try to make them feel like they are at home, or at least try.

-Anon

The Little Girl Inside Me

It started nine years ago when the person I thought I could call Dad did something horrible to me. I tried to run but I could never hide, whenever I knew it was time for him to come in my room I would hide under my blanket, praying for God to take me away, finally he came in when mom was asleep with my little brother.

He would shake and shake but I would never wake. And when I turned 8, 9 and finally ten and I told my mom. She said I was crazy, and sent me to school.

That was the day the little girl inside broke down and died.

I started school, smokin' weed and meth at the age of ten. I was surprised when I heard a knock on the door, it as the police coming to save me.

When he was tried, convicted, and sent to prison, that was when my mom threw me out. When I turned 12.

I met the guy of my dreams so I thought, from getting beat and put down. Turning thirteen, I found out I was pregnant, seven months later, here comes baby Teresa, a few months before my fourteenth birthday.

And then the "love of my life" was nowhere to be found. Three years later, she's three years old, I'm turning seventeen next month, and surprise surprise... I'm five months pregnant.

But now I'm with a wonderful guy for two years now, and he accepts me for even after the things I've done, he makes me feel like number one.

-Cassandra

My Life's a Joke

It's not as easy as it seems.

Everyone thinks its just fun and games.

My parents left when I was nine.

Got kicked out of school when I was twelve.

Got pregnant at fourteen.

Baby daddy left me at seven months pregnant for someone else's.

Got pregnant again at sixteen.

My brother got killed two days after Christmas.

He was only twenty years old.

My grandparents want nothing to do with me anymore.

Life sucks for me but it's worse for someone else. I'm not a bad person, but maybe I make wrong decisions.

I'm just looking for someone to love me.

-Rosie

Vision

I'm in a caged condition

On the street, I had pride

And I was ready to ride

But my past has died

and inside my mind is in another dimension.

I hear lectures now and again

From my family and friends. As hell expands, a and I pretend to listen. Explaining that the road is a road that's wrong and ends in prison.

But it wasn't until I felt and was held in a cell that I realized its real.

As time revolves, in fear of it all,

I walk the halls, and stare at the walls

And a phase caught my attention:

It stated that "the worst thing in life is to have sight with no vision."

-Bruce

A Story of a Lifetime

My life started in a small town; with an anger filled man I called my father. He started out by beating my sister. He struck her in the face as my mother went to stop him, he swung other pregnant stomach, with a baby we weren't sure would make it, well finally this man was taken away.

Well that baby was me. I sure did make it but in reality I didn't. As I grew up I was in a loving caring family, anything a girl could dream of, but we were in poverty. What I dream for is what I don't have... my dad's money. He left and took all our money for his drugs. But since then we had no money. As I grew towards my elementary years I was an angry child I was only thinking about who was to take it out on, so I began taking it out by smoking weed.

To make this long story short, I went from weed to gang banging to ecstasy to meth to crack to cutting and trying to kill myself I finally got to the point where i was drunk driving on a four wheeler (quad) and we crashed in a ditch as we crashed I flipped over the quad and it ran me over. I was in a death situation. I was hospitalized for about two weeks, I go out with a lacerated, never almost failed long and kidney is that all I know I went back to drugs. I was on a six-month trip and I will go on from there with a little story.

I started an argument with my best friend and she explained to me it was time to quit but I wouldn't so she beat the f&^% out of me, I left this fight with a black eye, as swollen as a golf ball. That was my nickname for a while. I also had a swollen bloody lip!

But the question is, did I quit? No.

Then I met the boyfriend of my dreams, or so did I think...

We started out close friends or should I say best friends, and we were as close as Siamese twins. I started out as a virgin with this man, but one day later he took my virginity. But that's not all he took. He took my virginity.

He started to beat me. But over what? My drug addiction. I begged him for the last pill and he did the same thing my best friend did. Beat the hell out of me. My dignity was gone, the drugs were gone, but why?

Because I wouldn't stand for him not giving me my drug, it was mine. I stole it, so tried to kill this little boy for the pill, I beat him until we went running out the house.

I wouldn't let him he tried to jump out the window. So I let him. I already got the pill, those were just a few of my psycho stories. From the end of my, and road close to death.

I ended up in jail and county facilities for nine months and I'm committed to Caliente (a youth jail) for who knows how many more months.

-Psych

An Innocent Young Woman

I shouldn't be there because I'm an innocent young woman that deserves to be pursuing my dreams outside of jail. I've never done anything wrong.

But the system is so screwed up that I have been sitting here for almost a week, and they haven't even contacted my mother to let her know where I am. So she doesn't know that her baby is locked up and if something just happens to me, that'll be the end.

-Innocent Gal

My Dysfunctional House: Ten People, Two Bedrooms

I was out doing drugs hangin' out with my friends because I didn't wanna be in a dysfunctional place.

I had to go home to a two bedroom apartment with ten people -- my mom trying hard to take care of the eight people. She needs to my dad have his woman living with his family and beating my mother. Me: Hating him with a passion, telling my mother to leave him now, he will never learn. Me: Asking God to hold me back from killing him till finally he's out.

But before he leaves, he has to beat my mother up and down the street while my little brothers watch him pull her hair out, black her eyes, take all her shhh, car, money, while she has to take care of eight people!

I hate him. He's gone now, and she takes it out to me, repeating everything he did to her and to me. I ran -- no shoes no socks no stopping for about a mile. I get to my destination, crying my eyes out -- best friend at the door, welcoming me with 16 pills and two fat blunts to take away my pain.

We're out of pills; we need more so we go to Smiths (jackpot) lots of pills we take them all, put them in our purse, we're on our way, out the door.

Sore staff comes I try to the back, go back to the front to try to just fight my way out, and now I'm' here, went to court to find my dad to get me out with no ID.

You idiot, I thought to myself. He's gone. I'm still here, going crazy. Can't stop crying, praying... it's not working

Court in two days, birthday in five. My mother went to California, to get a car, and the police got her.

She's in jail, I'm here, she's the only person that could get me out. I sit here and wonder how long will I be here. This place is breaking me. I never thought I would need my mother as much as I do here.

I have to get out of here.

-Marshawna

My World, My Life, My Love...

You never know what you got til someone takes you away from them.

I never thought that this day would come.

They took me from my mom. My nephew and the love of my life, Juana. I got in the game at age eleven.

My mom and Juana told me I needed to get the fuckin' game

I told them I would and never did. They told me told they would stand by me. I didn't believe them, cause my dad had walked out.

Now I'm locked up, nowhere to go. Only to talk to my mom Tuesday and Friday

Only seeing my mom on Saturday for an hour and a half.

Now I now the game ain't shhh.

Now I know whey my mom and Juana told me these things

Now I know the game ain't for me.

Now when I get out I'm gonna change for my mommy and my nephew and the love of my life cause I don't want to see the tears in the eyes they mean too much to me no they game, ain't shhh but just something that ruins up life, 'cause look at me where am I at now.

Now it's my time to change my ways.

-Carmen

Livin' on Lies

Sittin' in the back on the wall
Waitin' for my friends to give me that call

They say "What's up, let's go hit a lick"

I don't hesitate, I get there quick.

Walkin' down the street

Me and my "friends" meet

I find the perfect house

I just wanna get in and get out

They pound on the door,

See if someone's home

Nobody answers, I go to the back.

I find an easy window and get out my jack.

I push it in the window pop it off the tracks

Net thing I know, I'm inside the house, bein' quiet and quick, just like a mouse.

A bedroom is locked. I don't know what to do

I pull out my Nine and kick the door open

Relieved that my gun is not yet smokin' No one's there, so we go in and search

Not nobody knows what my livin' is worth

I get to the closet, guess what? It's locked, I do it again.

It comes open and I find no one is in.

I call my "friends" tell 'em what I've found

Nothing but someone's guns laying on the ground

They pick 'em up there was four on the ground.

They take 'em out of the cases -- that's what I saw.

They layed on the bed and then one said

"Ill search the living room and you check the window"

I stayed back to finish my search

Next thing I heard

BAM!

The back door slams

I figure the owner's home and came through the back to the window

Open the curtains and who did I see

No one but the owner, starin' back at me

I think "Oh shhh"

I need to get out quick

I head for the door

I wanna live, and more

I say "oh have you seen my dog

He said "I've seen no dog, you damn whore!"

Now what the hell were you doin' in my door?"

I give up and start to book

I ran for ten minutes I hit walls, so I thought I was off the hook,

I change my clothes, take off my glasses

Think it's all god as a cop passes

Next thing to happen the cop turns around

She says, "hey get the fuck on the ground,"

I say, "Why, what did I do?"

"You look like a suspect" is what he did say

He took me in his car that one awful day.

He searched my stuff and what did I have?

What do you know but drugs I had.

I don't know what to say so I said I would sell them

Next place I'm at is jury in booking

I come to the back and since then I'm in here

It's been to months I've been admitted

I'm not gonna lie to you because I have just been committed.

-Amarian

Where's Daddy

Oh how I ask myself every day, "Where is Daddy?" If I am lucky, I get to see him once a month. Every time we visit, I don't have the courage to talk to him. I just stare at him through the glass. There really isn't much to say. I said everything I wanted to say to him the first time he went to jail.

I told him I loved him. I asked him why he did what he did. He said, "You got to do what you got to do." This was to make me feel better.

I told him I thought it was dumb of him to take the blame for something my brother did. He told me he did it for my brother, and for the family. I know my dad did what he did to protect us, but protecting us made it worse. We didn't get to see our dad. No one talked to my brother. They all blamed him. Everyone in my family started drifting apart, not talking. It was like we weren't even a family anymore.

The second time my dad went to jail, he went for leaving the country and not calling his parole officer. I had told him to call, that if he got caught one more time I wouldn't have a father anymore and he should forget he had a son, that I had already heard too many excuses.

How would you feel if your father went to jail for something as minor as that? My mom told me, "He is still your father," and that I should love him no matter what. I guess I still love him, but I don't want to get close to him and see him get taken away again.

After he went to jail I kept to myself a lot—became the quiet kid that no one noticed and no one really cared about. At one point I didn't even have any friends. No one talked to me, so I didn't have to say anything about my life. I kind of like it that way, but inside I feel sad and angry. In this world, though, no one wants to see that so I keep it all to myself.

My dad sends me a letter for my birthday. I just start to cry because I can't even see him.

I say to my mom and dad that I don't have a father anymore and I don't care if he gets out of jail. I am only kidding myself. The first time he got out of jail, I was eleven. I was home at the window and my face lit up like the sun when I heard him calling my name from the curb. I ran out of the house and hugged him, crying and crying. I pinched myself like 100 times just to make sure it wasn't a dream. Then he went back to jail and my world came crashing down.

I ask my mom if she misses him. She doesn't say a word. I think it is because she is secretly seeing someone else. She acts like nothing happened and goes on with her life. I feel bad for her, but I should talk—I am the same way.

When my dad is out, it is a whole different story. Mom smiles and laughs and has the time of her life. I feel so happy for her because it's been like forever since I have seen her be that happy. I guess she does love him.

From The Beat: We are pleased to have back in our pages the third installment of writings from Project WHAT! If you didn't get a chance to read the last two weeks of writings, allow us to give you a taste of who and what Project WHAT! is all about before you dive into their latest contribution. First, we want to thanks Anna Wong, Program and Policy Director of Project WHAT, who has so kindly share these important entries. Also by way of background, this very cool program is a program of Community Works, a nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California. They can be reached at (510) 486-2340 or go online to: [HYPERLINK "http://www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html"](http://www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html) www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html. If you're a young person who has a parent incarcerated and want a copy of their resource guide, they'll mail you a free copy. We urge you to call them or ask us and we'll get you the information. With that said, we hope you enjoy this latest entry. We know this incredibly priceless outlet provides participants with the opportunity for meaningful, paid work experience; Helps participants develop skills in areas such as teamwork, writing, research, public speaking, facilitation, and fundraising; and supports participants in achieving their life goals and ambitions. This week we want to welcome Luis to the pages of The Beat Within with his powerful and thoughtful piece of writing.

The second time they told me he was getting out, I put my best clothes on and sat next to the window like a dog waiting for his master's return. He didn't show. I asked my mom to call and check if he was released. She looked at me with a sad face. I swallowed my feelings in front of her and acted like it didn't bother me. As soon as I got to my room I started crying, but then I told myself, "Hey, what's the difference? He hasn't been here for me for most of my childhood. Why should it matter to me now?"

My mom says that my dad is coming out soon, and that we can be a family again. I don't think that's possible. Too much has.

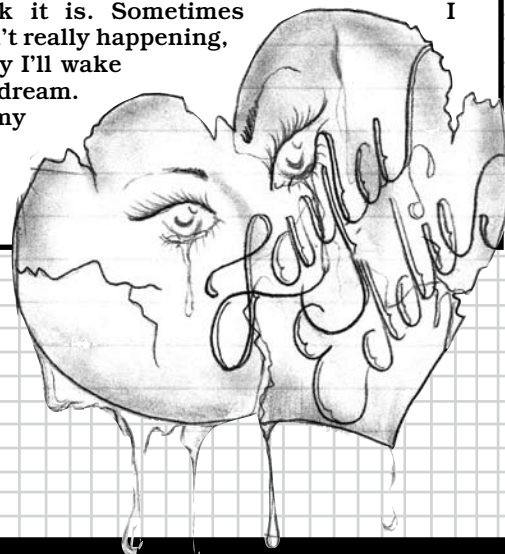
I hate that when my dad gets out, no one tells him what they really feel. But I do the same thing. I can't get the courage to tell him how much he has hurt me and everyone else around him. I guess that's how my family wants it—to act like nothing ever happened. I love the moments I get to spend with him when he is out, and I sort of get why my family says nothing. I guess we would rather have some moments of happiness with my dad than not have him in our lives at all.

My dad is out now. I am fifteen. He first went in when I was seven. I haven't seen him once since I was eleven, except in that horrible place that is the jail waiting room. He is in Mexico and wants us to go there too. I tell him I won't leave the people I love here, because some of them have helped me out more than my father. "How do you expect to tell me anything, when you haven't been there almost my entire life?" I ask. He tells me he has no right, but he is trying to make everything right.

Some people I have told this to tell me that it seems like a bad dream or something made up and sometimes I think it is. Sometimes I feel like all this isn't really happening, that maybe one day I'll wake up from this bad dream.

I call this dream my life.

-Luis, Project WHAT!



I can't get the courage to tell him how much he has hurt me and everyone else around him.

Freedom

I am always in a state of confusion,
Living in a country where freedom is just an illusion,
At time I often think of ways to be free or the closest
solution,

The way I look at it is the closer I am to freedom the
more this country becomes abusive,
Freedom is just a fantasy in my eyes it is always elusive,
Now I see my dreams of freedom are often conclusive,
I wonder to myself will we ever open our eyes that holds
us from our emancipation,
But being bended from my freedom won't stop me from
reaching my destiny I'm just moving up in a certain
elevation,

Freedom in this country is something you can not reach
within a foot or a mile,

I live a rebellious life so you'll never hear me agree to
their terms or reconcile,
Many come to this country for freedom but in my eyes it
was always forbidden,

Freedom in this country is more of a thought, because I
can't grasp it,

Living in a country that is overruled by its corrupt
conditions,

Some may think I'm prejudiced towards this country
because of my opinions and my suspicions,
For centuries this country was known to criticize other
races so why get mad when I set on educational critique,
So why set such a fantasy of freedom that is just make
believe,

Till this day we still live as mental slaves,
In the land of the free and the home of the brave.

-Kaho, Alameda

From The Beat: You see the truth when the leaders disguise it/And the first step out of the master's cage is to realize it/To see the bars for what they are/The bling the stars the tricked out car/But it's not enough to just see through it/Or to go to jail and say "I Knew It"/Or you saw the truth but still blew it/Break free like Nike, man up: Just Do It

The World is Crazy, Huh!

This jail shhh is for the birds, The white man got shhh
set up for us blacks to fail. He brings drugs into this
country to get us high, but then he locks us up when
we go rob someone to support our habit, or he keeps us
poor in the hood and expects us not to sell drugs after
he shows us how much money we can make off of it. It's
a messed up world that we live in and now all we have to
do is realize it and make a change before it's too late. And
the next thing that the white man wants is us on a t-shirt,
'cause our caskets are already dropping.

If we just take time to think about life itself then well
see what's really going on. All people are different, it's
our nature to do what we do. Like some people were born
to be doctors and lawyers and others of us were born to
be thugs. God made us all different and to serve different
purposes in the world. If there were no thugs like us to
commit crimes, then there would be no need for jails
and lawyers to even exist. There would be no judges,
prosecutors, or any of these crooked ass staff. The same
thing for doctors, 'cause if nobody got sick or shot and
had to go to the hospital then they wouldn't have a job. I
think to exist they all need thugs... we're all connected in
this world.

Now it's up to us to make this change in the world.
Now it's up to us to make this change in the world cause I
think we all had enough of this life we live. The choice is
yours. Now take some time to think because we all need
to realize: This is reality.

-Lil' Rome, Alameda

From The Beat: He's hella mad, and now he's hella thinking... It's good to see you step up and start looking at the world that you move around in more critically. If you follow the logic of what you're saying here, then that means that if a young man like you starts thinking about drugs, drinking, selling on the street, stealing cars, or doing any of the stuff that you describe, it's like he's really letting himself become a slave of the system. So how does a person free himself from that slave mentality? What's the next step?

Woke Up This Morning

Woke up this morning, feeling a peace of mind,
Sitting in my cell because a person dropped the dime.

Woke up this morning in search for inner peace,
Refusing to lay down to the system as another deceased.

Woke up this morning, trying to grab the light,
Trying to convince myself that it's worth living the life.

Woke up this morning, at a loss for words.
I thought that I was screaming, but nothing is ever
heard.

Woke up this morning, wishing that my crimes I never
had committed,

Saying that this time I surely up and did it.
But because of waking up this morning I realized that
my life isn't at an end,

Saying to myself that I will taste freedom again.
That's why I love waking up.

This goes out to my cousin that is experiencing the same
as me. Much love to my cousin.

-Giovanni, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You are a young man who has put his brain in gear, and no one can know how much you will benefit from using the tools that you were born with to think things through, and then to act. As for The Beat, we want to assure you that when you "scream" we "hear!" How wonderful to end this piece so beautifully by reminding us all that the mere act of "waking up" is an affirmation of life itself and very much worth appreciating, as you do. Keep teaching!

I'm Still Here

I laugh 'cause I'm still here
Reminiscin' got me smiling as I shed a tear
Could've died my younger teenage years
While pulling licks and drinking beers
In G ride too drunk to steer
Put my life at risk and didn't care
Family and friends advice went in and out my ear
Thought my problems would all disappear
When I reached for the bottle they suddenly weren't
there

I was playin' a deadly game of truth or dare
Trust and believe nowadays life is severe
Headed to CYA for the next couple of years
I feel as if no one cares
I'm searching for love in these lonely tiers
Only thing that keeps my mind in gear
Is the blood and sweat and tears
Of my concrete peers
That are no longer here
Who taught me never to fear
When the futures not clear
Because I'm still here

-Lil' L, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Yes, you're still here, and we're glad of that. It can't be true that "nobody cares," because it's obvious to us that you care about yourself and your future. Finding people to care is not easy, but it's worth the effort. At the same time, "searching for love in these lonely tiers" is even more difficult because of difficulty of showing emotions in a place where emotions are thought of as weaknesses. All we can say, Lil' L, is be your own man, love yourself, and you may be surprised at those who respond to your own vibes.

A Dark Foggy Night

It was a dark foggy night. I was chilling with my guardian angel on a street near my house. Nobody in site but a couple of demons, standing on the corner tryin' to win over a couple of human souls.

I asked my angel, "What are we doing tonight?"

He said, "We're gonna shoot some dice with this thing I have seen many moons ago."

I said, "We know him?"

He said, "Yes. He was there when your friend got shot two days ago. Remember?"

I said, "No."

"He was with your dad that night on the street when he got shot by the police. There he is!" he said.

It was the grim reaper himself.

A few minutes later we started to shoot dice. He was good. Ten minutes later I was down to my last my dollar when I started thinking, hummm, I think I'll cheat. Yea, I'll tell him that I'll give him my soul if he lets me borrow \$1000. I'll go home and not come back. He did and the minute I started walking away, a car pulled up and gunshots came out. I started to run, not looking back.

I'll always remember that was the night I cheated death.

-Daniel, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Sometimes we may think we're cheating and/or getting over, but sometimes it catches up with us down the line. So can we really say then that we cheated and got away? From the start of your story it looked like you were in a bad situation. Luckily you had your guardian angel with you at the time. If you had to relive this experience, would you do anything different? If so, what would it be? What message did you get from this experience, if any?

White Boy In Jail

What's up Beat? I'm still here and The Beat wanted me to talk about being the only white kid in the unit, and I figured it would make a good topic. So, listen up, while I take you through the shoes of an incarcerated white kid...

Being incarcerated, I always find myself being the only white kid, the majority being blacks. They always try to gang up on anyone that looks different from them. They believe all white kids are rich, live in a big house, and have perfect lives. Little do they know, my life is far from that. I've had to rob and steal to get things I've needed in life, just like the others in here.

Growing up, I've lived with a bipolar father who was always gone trying to make a living for us, but barely making it by. My mother was an alcoholic who died when I was thirteen.

The black kids in here think they are hard and tough and think all white kids are soft, but I've seen as much as them or probably more. Most of them haven't seen their mom laying in a casket.

Growing up, I haven't had anyone to look out for me, I had to struggle for the little I got. I'm the same as them, the only difference is skin color. I'm in the same place as them, committed crimes like them, the only difference is I'm white.

But they figure white kids have that fairy tale life of living happily ever after, but that's far from the truth of my life.

-Tyler, Alameda

From The Beat: People make so much of skin color, when our hearts, blood, and bones are all the same... if we could look under the skin to see that, we'd realize how much we all have in common. You stepped up to the challenge and bared something about who you are underneath the skin - who you are in the place where what you have in common with the other young people in here matters much more than what is different.

Them Days

February 2nd 2007, I woke up, normal day. ate a little bit of breakfast, chillin', watchin' TV, then I got the call....

It was my dad, he was crying telling me how much he loved me, saying "he was sorry," and I asked him what was going on.

He said he was "trying to get the balls to do it," and I said "Do what?" He said he loved me. He asked to talk to my mom. He talked to her and my sister, they started crying, then I got back on the phone, and he told me he wanted me to straighten up, and start acting right.

He said he loved me again, I knew what was going on so I was telling him to get some sense and to think about what he's doing. I told him I love him.

He said something, then I heard the phone drop. At that moment my dad intentionally overdosed on heroin. That very next day, police called and said they found him at a motel on February 3rd, that officially made February 2nd and 3rd THE WORST DAY OF MY LIFE.

-Codi, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: We are very sorry to hear about your father's death. What ever you do, do not take the same path as your father. Listen to his words "straighten up" change your way of life; change your way of thinking. Move your life into a positive way in both your actions and your way of thinking and life as you know it will have a better meaning.

Worst Day Of My Life

There are good days and there are bad days. One of my bad days happened when I was 9 or 10. I could never forget that day. I remember I was sleeping and my aunt woke me and my sister up. She told me that my mom and my pops had gotten into a car accident. My sister and I were shocked.

My aunt drove us to the hospital to see our parents. I was very nervous. We waited for about forty minutes. We went to see my father first, and he was unconscious, and badly hurt. He wasn't wearing his seat belt, so he flew forward and hit his head.

I broke out in tears. I couldn't take it.

Next we went to see my mother. She was badly injured. She was wearing a seatbelt, but when she flew forward, three of her ribs punctured her lungs. She got lucky. The ambulance came in time.

I started crying more when I saw her.

We stayed for about forty minutes and then we left. That was the worst day of my life.

-Avalani, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We are so glad that your parents survived the accident. And we are glad that you are able to share that difficult time with us. It's good for each of us to be able to talk about hard times, but not always easy to do. But talking about our troubles is one of the ways we get through them.

This Morning

It was locked.

No sun except through my milky rectangle square in the wall excuse for a window.

No birds chirping outside, neither was the moon present, threatening to disappear, to return only when the sun expired.

Instead I opened my eyes to four white walls, graffiti, and voices of the two-faced system.

I blame the man in the mirror for setting off on this cruise mumbling bon voyage to my life.

It's a shame when the highlight of your day is LME, so you can receive a hint of the sun and imagine and wonder

what the day was like for the rest of the world!

-Deloney, Alameda

From The Beat: You use good adjectives to describe how it is in your mornings. No one in their right mind would want to be in that predicament, so why are you? Why do you do things that make LME the highlight of your day?

Worst Day My Whole Life

What's really good wit' da Beat? You already know this D-Studda, and today I want an opinion from y'all about my topic, which is if God loves everybody, then why He making my life so damn hard?

It started when I was a lil' boy between four and five years old. Moms and pops always fought. One day, pops was really beatin' moms ass, so I picked up a bat and rocked him wit' it. A few moths later, moms didn't want me wit pops, ya feel me? So we went to court for at least six months before the judge asked me who I wanted to stay with. I said moms, but she had just got out of jail for a dope case. So they left me wit' pops.

He was pissed because I didn't wanna stay wit' him, so he started abusing me the whole year I was stayin' wit' him. After that I was sick of him hittin' me for no reason, so I grabbed his gun and told him, "Don't you eva put yo' hands on me again!" But some body was callin' in on pops for child abuse, so now we at court once again. But this time I got bruises on me, so the judge gave me to moms...

So now I'm like six to seven years old moms pregnant wit' anotha boy, so she really strugglin' to feed the fam.... So she have the baby, (my lil' brother Terrell W. the first) an innocent child.

So moms tryna get her life straight — got a job and a baby sitter. So one day, moms off to work, it's just me, lil' brah and this baby sitter, ya feel me? I go play my Nintendo, lil' brah in the back room asleep, or I thought he was. But after two hours, he ain't cryin' or makin' no noise, so I'm like, "Something ain't right." So I go and check on lil' brah and it's blood all ova the floor and the walls. I didn't know what to do! I'm just lost and lookin'.

Baby sitter say, "It cool, lil' ninja, go to your room," but I couldn't. Couple hours later, moms come home, went straight to the room and went crazy. She picked my brah up and ran to my neighbor's house and called the police. The dude was arrested, but only did nine months. They said wasn't enough evidence, so they released him. Then they came and took me away from moms. They said it was dangerous for me to live there wit' dude out, so they put me in foster care!

I wasn't able to see my family for years. But then after like three years, no visits, no phone calls, mom finally got her life right, moved out of San Francisco, and I was able to get weekend home passes. But I ain't know my moms. I mean, I knew who she was, but I didn't trust her. So here I am mad at moms for letting the crackas take me away. Man, I was cussin' her out and shhh! Then pops came back around. I got my day pass wit' him, and we went to the hospital. I'm like, "Why we goin' here for?"

He say, "Ya grandma sick." So I'm like, "Oh, she comin' home in a few days," (because Grandma Marie was my favorite granny and I was her favorite grandson.) But I wasn't prepared for what I was told. Granny had cancer bad and was dying fast. I went to go see her, and right when I walked to her room, her life support thang went BEEEEEEEEEP and she was gone.

I went bad in General Hospital. I went back to the foster home and started goin' off too... So now I'm like ten or eleven. I'm eatin' dinner when the owner called me to the phone. It's moms. She say, "We need to talk so I'm pickin' you up and they lettin' you stay for a week." I'm like, yeah, whatever.

So the weekend come and she pick me up. She break e'rythang down, like my closest cousin Anthony aka Ant-Meez died. I mean, shhh, we was like brothers, ya know. She said they was crossin' the street to go back home

when all of a sudden he had a seizure and died on the sidewalk. I was just thinking the whole time I was home about life wit'out my big cousin Anthony, and at his funeral everybody went crazy! Man that shhh really hurt watchin' them people put my cousin in the ground. I put a picture of me and him on top of his casket and his tombstone is a picture of me and him at my birthday party. I cried for years about the loss of my cousin.

They moved me to Oakland, a place called Lincoln Child Center. First day there I had made a best friend. His name was Dominique. He was cool folks, ya dig, on his way to college. But on my third year there, he committed suicide, or at least that what they say it was. But only me and the person responsible for his death know what really went down. I saw the whole thing but I'm not wit' snitchin'. I just prayed that God take matters in His own hands. But just know Dominique wasn't the type to kill himself, B. We had a memorial for him. Since I knew his favorite color, I wore it and got on stage to talk. His girl Serita went schizo, cryin' and fainted.

The next year when I was about to be a teenager, I got released to moms, and she moved back to the projects. The first day back home, me and moms talked for hours and resolved our problems wit' each other. So it's like '03-'04, moms got two mo' kids, ya feel me? I'm the oldest and I hated seein' my moms struggle to raise me and my lil' brothers, so I went to my ex neighbor. Remember the house mom ran to to use the phone? Yeah, his name Da'Da-D. I told him about my situation at home. He say, "Well, you can roll wit' me, lil' ninja. My home yo' home." So from there, I started kickin' it wit' him and his lil' brah Ron. He introduced me to the squad he be wit'. It was crazy.

One day I'm like at his house playing PS 2 when he comes in like I got some money for you. I'm like, "Chea, that's what I'm talking 'bout! We go down stairs and he hand me some zip-bags with hella rocks! I said, "Man, thought you had some money for me!" He said, "That's it. You got money, you just gotta make it." He told me what to do, but, shhh, I ain't neva sold no drugs! So I'm outside the whole day bustin' knocks thinkin' I'm doin' something. At 9:30 I go in the house, and he like, "How much you make?" I'm like, "I ain't count, but it's a lot." Handed him the money and he started laughin'. I'm thinkin' he laughin' because I made hella money my first time, but that wasn't why he was laughin'.

He was laughin' because I only made two hundred and fifty dollars. I'm like, "Shhh! That a lot to me." But the next night we made hella money, ya feel me? We was walkin' to his house when moms pulled up and noticed me! She said, "I hope you ain't out here sellin' drugs, Scharod!" I lied to her, like, "Naw, I'm just chillin'." She wasn't fallin' fo' tha BS. She say, "I don't want you in my house!" I'm like, "Cool."

I told him she kicked me out, and I stayed wit' him for a while. But I started kickin' it wit' my cousin. This guy had me on hypes pullin' licks from left to right for him. But I was like, OK, whatever. The first time I robbed somebody was smooth and I liked the adrenalin rush you get. I musta pulled 100 licks for him, but I got half of whatever we made. Then he called me, like it's this lady finna cash a check for two racks. I'm like, a'ight. So me and some of the squad hook up go to the spot. All we did was wait till she came out. When she walked out, man, I was like, "Hell naw! I'm not robbin' no old lady!" So I sit at the bus stop and lit up a 'port.

My ninja was like, "I'ma do it then!" I tried to stop him but, shhh, he ain't listen. All you hear is, "Excuse me ma'am!" She turned around and, smack, he hit her wit' one

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of them ones! I swear, I dropped my cig' and walked back home, like man, that was foul. But they came to my house and I did take some of the money. I got arrested for what they did, but I was innocent, and on my court date the lady came to court and didn't even know why she was there and what fo', so I was released. I apologized to the lady anyways.

But after my first time, I just kept on comin' back, but they neva had evidence, so they kept releasin' me. Home was gettin' worse because moms tried to be mom and dad. So one day we arguing and I let her have it. I said, "Man, you ain't my damn mom or my dad because you let the white people take me away! You didn't even raise me, and my dad was neva there, so don't ever..." She started to cry, and said, "Give me a chance to be a mom to you." But I walked out like a dummy.

Two weeks later, me and my cousin and this dude that he know went down for strong arm robbery and hella otha shhh, but I was getting played the most because they had me on camera. I also took my cousin charges because he had just got out ten days befo', so they sent me to a group home. My first grouper I stayed, but the day I was supposed to leave. I got into a fight and ended up back in the halls. Back in the halls when I was in unit B4, my dad was shot five times but survived. Six months later he was stabbed, so I was stressing because no matter how a felt about him back then, he still my pops.

But anyway, I got released to a group home, but I ran! I was rollin' wit' my lil' cousin Denise. First day on the run, chillin' at his house and he had some 'dro, (I neva smoked weed at this point of my life.) But yeah, I smoked my first blunt wit' my lil' cousin, and when that shhh kicked in, I was on one. We walked to the projects, and I'm high, so we hollerin' at any girl we see. He got this girl, and I hop on this girl. And after that, we started hoppin' on grown females.

We so wasted we both tried to kick game at our uncle's wife! I ain't recognize her till she said, "Ain't y'all Beaner's folks?" I say, "Yes, that uncle right there." She was like, "Yeah, ain't you Studda's son?" I say yeah. So afta kickin' it, we go back to his house and somehow me and this girl start talkin', and she told my lil cousin she wanted to be friend, which is a good thing because, come to find out, they cousins! But yeah, main, I got rapped again messin' wit' my ninja...

A month later, I'm out to a grouper in Sac. Everybody from San Francisco up there, so I fit right in. I was doin' cool,

getting' home passes, runnin' wit' Denise, squashed the beef wit' the towers — well, it wasn't really beef, more like a "he-say-she-say" thing about a stolen dog, so I'm in the mix of somebody else shhh. Yep, I got jumped, but I ain't gig out. But now I mess wit' my project ninjas. E'ry time I'm out, I'm in the projects high and drunk shooting dice in the alley, or just kickin' it wit' my OG uncles.

But yeah, now I'm back in the new halls which is really shady. This hole look a lot like Rita! Up tier, down tier. Got beef, but it's fake beef, we be goin' at it in basketball for phone calls. And when we go to sleep, we holla our tier. Me, I be holla'in, "Down tier!" Then they got this thang... we call ninjas by they girl's name. Like for example, they be like, "D-Studda?" I be like, "What?" They say, "Good night, La'Rec." Then I be like, "Termite?" He says, "What?" Then I be like, "Good night, Lil' Lazy."

But man, it ain't sweet up here in unit-7. Man, I been in like three conditions wit' these square-ass staff. My lil' cousin been in, but they always sucka punch a ninja.

It's coo' though. I'm seventeen now, ya dig, and mom and me tight. She got five kids now, me bein' the oldest, my lil brotha that died the next oldest (RIP Turtle T Terrell W. The First). He'd be 15 right now, but he still living in me. And the third oldest, he finna be a teen, ya feel me? His name Terrell W. the second. Fourth, my lil' brah Rasheed. He just made one. That's my lil' ninja, though.

But I'm not finna be home till afta I'm 18 in five months (12/06/89) ya dig. Yeah, I'ma Sagittarius. In the meantime, I'ma be in my damn cell down-tier, unit 7

But before I get windy, I just wanna give respect to the lives lost, so a moment of silence..... RIP.

But there you have it, my life So my question to The Beat is: do you think God is just testing me, or getting back at me for not goin' to church?

-D-Studda, San Francisco

From The Beat: What an epic piece of writing this is! You've had a very rough life, but somewhere along the way, you've learned to write and to express yourself, and those are skills that can serve you well throughout your life. Here's how we look at things. While none of can answer your question about God (because nobody knows the mind of God, assuming god exists at all), we can't imagine a God that punishes a child in the way you've been punished! So, we put the blame on the human beings in your life. But that only excuses and explains the early part, the part where you really had no choice in the matter. Now comes the part where you do have choices, and where you do have to own up to your own responsibility for those choices. Now comes the hard part — will you keep doing the things you've been doing and continue to pay the high cost (your freedom), or will you make that extra effort to use your skills to move out of the life that leads you to this pseudo-slavery, and claim a better (and free) future? We know that's not easy, but then, nothing in your life has been easy. If God is testing you, will you pass the test?

Cheating Death

The moment we were born, we were destined to die. But what we do before our death is what will make our death memorable, or just another person that died. People who experience a close call with death, are warned by death himself to change whatever they are doing that's bad in their life. Good, or bad people, experience the near death situation and will always remember about their experience with death. And say to themselves that they cheated death. But they haven't cheated death, death is the keeper of your life. He chooses when you shall die, or not.

Or if he warns you, it means that if you keep doing what you do, your death will come up real soon. So if you cheated death, death planned that you live through the incident that could of caused your death. Death will always be there. Looking out for you and everyone.

-John, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Your thoughts on death were interesting. What's also interesting is that you never mentioned if you ever had a near death experience. Question, how did you come to look at death this way? What exactly influenced you, or shaped the way you now look at death?

Looking To Be A Winner

I feel good 'cause I'm 'bout to leave in two to three weeks to the Ranch. I'm 'bout to go do something I haven't done in three years, and that's finishing a program. All these years I been trying to beat the system, but they still got me and I'm the loser in this battle that I brought to myself.

The only way to win is to handle my thizzness and finish my program. Some advice to all the youngsters that are going to a group home and thinking of running... expect to come back and that's a fact 'cause I been through it for a long time. So think about what you going to do in life.

-Victor, San Francisco

From The Beat: There is both wisdom and maturity in what you've written. We know the system is faulty sometimes, but like you said, you can't keep running. Go to your program with your head high and handle your business. It sounds like you're thinking positive, so keep that positive mind frame and positive things will come.

My First Hallucinagetic Experience

What up Beat? It's yo' boy Evек from the max... Well, this week has been pretty messed up, but oh well.

Well, I'ma write a couple of lines on this topic. Well 'shrooms... hmmm... it's a drug that just takes over your mind. Images flash before your eyes just crazy things in your mind. Well, the first time I ate some 'shrooms was about either a couple of years ago or a year ago, can't remember. Well, my first thought on hallucinagetic drug was, "Wow, it can alter my state of mind, and it can possibly kill me, my first time eatin' those caps and stems.

Well, the first time was with my friends. But anyways, we called our boy Mike and told him we wanted to get some Boomers. Mike said, "How much?" My boy told him four eighths. But Mike told us he would call us back. So we all waited for the phone call from Mike, like a bunch of meth fiends waiting for the pipe to be packed again just so you can hit it.

Well after about an hour, Mike calls tellin' us where to meet him and how much. So all of us went walking to go meet up with Mike. You know we did the damn thing and just walked away, and when we turned our backs to him, he yells, "Call me later so I can see how messed up you guys are!" I was thinkin' in my head, "Damn, are we gonna be that messed up?" But little did I know! So as we were all walkin'. We were thinkin' of a place to go and chill. Then we all decided to just go to the school and chill there. So all five of us walked to Burbank the school. It was the closest school to our houses, so we went there first.

Once we got to Burbank, we went to some benches to just chill and eat 'shrooms. So we all sat down, but there was only four of us gonna eat 'em so we was passin' out the ziplock bags of those yellow and blue stemmed 'shrooms. To me they looked hella gross. They tasted gross too, but it was worth it in the end. But anyways, the four of us ate the Boomers. But as we were sitting on the bench, an hour goes by and we all said it at the same time, "These were bunk!"

We were talkin' about where to go now, so I said why not Lincoln High. So after about 15 min. of arguing, we all went to Lincoln High. So after a five-minute walk, we went to Lincoln's football field and I swear, right when I stepped onto the field, these visions went to my brain and out my eyes. I was scared for a minute, but then I got into it. I started to get into it, so I lay in the middle of the field and I started to look up at the sky. It was freekin' green. I was hella amused by what I was seeing! Once I started to get look around my world. Well, how it seemed to me, it was inside out, like the under world was in my eyes!

Well, after about a half an hour of just trippin' out on the trees and the grass, we got up and started to walk through these gates. What we didn't see at first was all these dogs came running at us and we all got hella scared! The dogs had some blinking lights on their necks and it was hella trippy. I swear one of the dog was the size of a wiener dog! So, as we all kept walkin' in to Lincoln, we went in to the quad of the school, and when we got there, all the big-ass trees were in my face movin' hella weird. It was sick. The trees branches were startin' to droop down to the floor. I think we were there for about 15 minute.

We ended up staring at a wall with broken up tiles all sorts of colors. And what those tiles made in my eyes was a talkin' face. I didn't know what it was sayin', but it was weird. Once we noticed each other staring at it, we all lit up a stogie. After I lit 5 stogies, my lighter was dead and when my lighter dies I pop them. When I went to go pop it, I slammed it on the floor, and when it hit the floor it started to do flips in the air. After about two or three flips, it landed straight up, just standing there. And then we all freaked

out on what happened. I thought it was the 'shrooms, but it actually happened. It was really standin' there.

So after staring at that, we just left it there because none of us wanted to touch it! So as we started to walk we were gonna go to Trace Elementary School to go chill there. Damn, we started to get into the street, and we were across the street from Trace until we seen some hella bright neon Christmas lights. Then homie — I don't know what he was thinkin' — but he went up to the light bulbs and he tried to eat one, and it shocked him in his mouth. It was hella funny. I guess he was hungry! After laughing at him for a while, we started back on our mission to have a coo'-ass night. So we got to Trace and everybody else went to go sit at some benches.

Me? I fell in the hallway, and I was just staring at the trees... The trunks on the trees were growing. They would go really really high up, then get really really low to the ground. I was trippin! Then all of a sudden my friends were yellin' at me, tellin' me to get up because there was a cop at the stop sign with his high beam super flasher on. So I guess I was gettin' up hella slow because they came over to help me get up. So when I got up, we started to walk into the shadows and tried to get out of sight of the cop. Once all of us were in the back of the school, we were waiting for the cop to pass by us so we can go to our next destination.

I was lookin' at the street, and the cop was creepin' by hella slow with its ultra shining light facin towards the school right where we were standin'. And this whole time — I ain't gonna lie — I was scared. I was sayin' in my head, "Damn! I don't feel like runnin'!" But luckily, the cop just went by without a care. Maybe he didn't feel like chasin' us either. I don't know, but back to us.

Well, everybody came together again. My visions were gettin' crazier and crazier. When my friends came up to me, there was waterfalls coming out their eyes and someone was trying to talk to me, but I couldn't make out what they were sayin'. I swear, all I heard was, "Blah, blah, whaa, wha, wha." It was hella crazy. Everything in my vision was swaying from side to side.

Once I got my mind a little straight, they were pullin' me so we can leave just in case the cop came back. So all five of us went to Hoover Middle School. Once we got to Hoover, we were walkin' next to the swimming pool and stayed there on the benches for a while just staring at random things... you know, the floor moving, the trees moving in weird directions. After a while, I started to get hella thirsty, so I started to wonder off by myself to go get some water.

Once I got some water, I started to stare at a water sewer, and I couldn't believe my eyes. I seen a freakin' ninja turtle. It was the orange one. Damn! I will tell the truth. Once it started to come out the ground, I started to walk away hella fast because I was scared as hell. So I went up to my friends and told them what happened, thinkin' that they would want to get the hell out of there. But they all wanted to go see it! Then we heard it. It was a bat screeching hella loud. So we started to run. We didn't know what it was at first...

(To be continued)

-Evек, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We gave you a POW not because we endorse drug experimentation, but because you wrote about it so well. As far as taking any drugs (whether for the first time or not), even in what you experienced many things might have gone bad. It's not just the cop who could have arrested you, but also other "what ifs" — (What if your friend's attempt to eat that light bulb had resulted in his electrocution?) The truth is, most adults have experimented at some time or another with drugs, but not all those experiments end well. Some end in ODs (even first-timers); some end in jail; some end up doing humiliating things they would never do while sober. We wonder, if you dig deep enough, whether you can connect any drug use with the fact that you are now locked up. If you can, maybe it's time to re-evaluate this kind of experimentation.

Only For The Real...

What's up, Beat? This ya boy Lil' D... writing from 150... they just took me out of the max unit. So no more non-contact visits. But let me speak what's on my mind...

Why is ninjas so fake? I be reading stuff they be writing and saying and it's fake. They act like they really love they hood, but say they going to college. They come to jail and try to act hard, mean mugging and shhh, but they know deep inside they soft as hell and on the streets where they say they be at, real ninjas ain't never heard of them or saw them before. They either be hiding or stuck in the house scared to come out. So when they do decide to show up on they spot they say they from, ninja that's out there got to strip him or bust him. I just wish ninjas could stop playing a role they not, and to just be they selves. Ninjas come to jail and say they funk tuff with the enemies, but don't know what the street define word of "funking" is. They know they have no money or guns to funk with nobody.

And why all of a sudden everybody want a kid now? People in here write now say they got kids and baby mommas and shhh, but lying just to make it seem like you getting pearl. Ninjas think it's cool to have a kid. I mean I wouldn't know 'cause I don't got one, but that shhh ain't cool. It don't make you solid. How is having a kid, and you in jail, cool?

Ninjas come in here saying they got hella money and scrapers, and chargers, on 24's and 26's knowing damn well they don't grind, and they get money from their momma's and they ride AC transit. I ain't saying getting money from yo' mom is bad but ninjas know they get it from they mom's and then flip the script and say I be on the block getting it 24/7. Ninjas come to jail for robberies, but say they eating. Ninjas come to jail saying they a monster on the streets, but come to jail and meet new friends! That's how ninjas be slipping. They come to jail to meet a new ninja you ain't never seen before until you same to jail. And you say you go mess with him on the outs. But remember you don't know what he 'bout, then he go ahead and set you up and take everything you own. Just because you wanna brag and say "you got this, you got that." See people don't think like that. They minds not sharp enough.

But the thing that kills me the most is when people come to jail and then say they gon' change. People always writing in here saying stuff like this: "I hate being locked up like an animal". Well, here goes a suggestion: don't do the crime and come to jail crying 'bout how it is. They say stuff like "if only I would of did this or did that". Here goes another suggestion: well, you didn't, so that's your fault. They say stuff like "If I was the Judge, I would do this, do that." Well here goes another suggestion: You're not the judge. People think only for themselves, too. They expect someone to let them out when they robbed somebody, hurt somebody, but don't see the other side. What if somebody

rape yo' lil sister? What if somebody jump yo' lil' brother? What if somebody robbed yo' mama? Of course you go wanna kill them. But then if they get caught for it, you go wanna see them get time, hella time for it. Then you go find out and see what the judge thinks of you when you do the same things. Ninjas don't look at it like that though. People say they gon change when they get out, not do the same shhh over and over, but it's fake. 'Cause if yo' ninjas was to come with hella weed, hella drank, hella pills, and some girls, yo' first instinct is go' be "let me get on first, then take those girls to the house."

Or say yo' hood is funk tuff, and you get out and you know yo' hood is funk tuff. If you a real hood ninja, you go and help yo' ninjas and yo' hood out. But if you fake, you go stay in the house all day or even move across country or something.

If you really serious about changing, you taking big risks. First one is leaving yo' hood. Second one is moving away far out. Third one is forgetting all ya ninjas and hood family. Fourth is getting back in school. Fifth is getting a job. Then the last one is getting yo' own house. It's hard to do every one of these things. That's why I hate when people say they go change but knowing they not ready to do one through six of the things I just mentioned.

All I'm saying is be yo' self. Stay solid to yo' self. Forget what anybody thinks or say. Long as you know yourself, you have no worries. Don't come to jail lying just to kick it or to fit in. Don't say you a hood ninja and nobody from yo' hood knows you. Don't say you eating when still living off yo' mama. Don't say you got a kid, just "cause everybody else say they have one. Don't say you funk tuff with somebody and don't know what for, or have no money to funk. And don't say you wanna go to college yet still got the hood in you.

To and only to real soldiers that can relate to this, you know what the message is.

-Lil' D, Alameda

From The Beat: This piece made us want to stand up and cheer. Your fellow readers might get mad at first, because you are just pointing out some of the fronts that people put on when they come to the Hall, due to peer pressure or a desire to fit in. We hope that everybody reads this piece, not just the "real soldiers" but all young readers who may be struggling to stand up for themselves, ignore the peer pressure, and change the way they think about their lives. We wish you all the best on this path you are on. We hope that you will keep writing, even after you leave the Hall.

The Demons Take A Hold Of Me

I'm going insane holding conversations by my lonely
I never feel alone 'cause the demons take a hold of me
Slowly derailing me off of my train of thought
So I pop a pill and sip something
So I can clear my thoughts
'Cause it seems like
I'm only sober when I'm high
The voices robbed me of my feelings
Got me numbed all inside
So I try to find answers to my questions
Of my life
Look deep within myself
And come up with solutions
Find the sum of my problems and then come to
conclusions
I try so hard to please others I leave myself unhappy.
So forget the rest -- I look out for me.

-Stick boy, Alameda

From The Beat: Wow, you really show some adult insights in this poem. It makes sense right - when life is stressful, we take drugs to make the stress go away. Of course long term it makes things worse. And yeah - we wouldn't say forget the rest, but get your own mind straight first, and then when you know who you are, decide who is worthy of being someone you call friend.

If

If I have enough luck I will get out sooner than I thought.

I feel a knot in my throat when I think of my family.

When will I get to see my mom sipping on her coffee
early in the morning and watch the steam rise from the cup
in her hands?

I want to lay my head on my own pillow.

I want my feet on the ground with only gravity pulling me
down.

-Jose, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Beautifully written Jose. It is such a pleasure to see you discovering the power of words and language. We hope you take your newly found gift seriously. You could write your way into a better future, if you wanted to.

That's Just Life For Me

It maybe seems I'm selling cream like a life poster,
 Switchin' lanes left to right like a roller coaster,
 Body aim bullet name it's a death sentence,
 Picture frame family's name on the next picture,
 Liquid oil in the pot and I'm cooking chicken,
 At the house with my pops in my uncle's kitchen,
 I trace my sisters on the wall now they out there
 strippin',
 For some other ninja mouth I guess he out there
 pimpin',
 I dig deep in my dreams and I see the stars,
 Maybe one day I'll be one of them on the stage in Mars,
 Never thought about life goals but money and cars,
 The only Goal that I seen was soccer at parks,
 The only goal I accomplished is famished and
 dishonored,
 Conquered of beating monsters striving for living father,
 I'll be dead before I caught up a new ninja in the ground
 with my partners,
 The g.a.m.e. I needs to part from
 great sounds in my head like maelstrom,
 Sleep fast on the real 'cause I'm on one,
 Girl be quiet in the bed I hear yo' mom come,
 I step high up in the mountain cause I'm a giant,
 But so low in the dirt cause I'm so violent,
 I said my life's broke so where the tools at,
 Back in my daddy sack -- that's where it started at.

-Justin, Alameda

From The Beat: This flow swirls like a maelstrom too, negative and positive, with all the hopes and fears, with all the dark impulses that float through your brain and mind. Out of the drama in your life, you've birthed the heart of a poet - which means that you got your "living father" - it's you.

The Best And Worst Day Of My Life

The best day of my life was when my son was born. It was on December 5, 2005. I was so happy but scared at the same time. I was only going to be 15 years old. I really didn't no how to act or what to do, I just had a really good feeling in my heart.

When he was finally born I felt so scared to hold him he was so little. I named him Isaac. Every day after that was a great day, I had my girlfriend and my son with me all the time. This day was the best day of my life.

The worst day of my life was when my father died. It was Father's Day and I was driving to the store when my girlfriend and me got a call on her phone. It was my dad's brother, my uncle. He told us my dad had just blown up his house and 86% of his body was burnt. He told me they took him to UNM Hospital.

I was so in shock I didn't know how to react. I got out the driver seat and told my girlfriend Monique to take me by his house to see if it was true. Before we even got to the road I could see all kinds of cops, ambulances, and the fire department they were blocking the road. Once I saw that I told Monique to take me to the hospital it was nothing I would ever imagine, or with for anyone to see or feel. I was so in shock I couldn't handle it.

Five days later he died, the only thing I could do was talk to him, but with no response. This was the worst day of my life.

-Fabian, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: You have experienced plenty in your young life, from the birth of your son as a young teen, to the tragic death of your dad. How has these experiences shaped you? Can we say you are a stronger person, with the immense responsibility you have? And what about your dad? Why do you suppose this happened to him? We are sorry for your dad's lost. We also hope in due time you will find freedom and rejoice your family back home.

Unwanted Rights

Look beyond the lies and the promises they make
 Because these crooked politicians give you some rights
 And it's your money they take
 Saying it's all for our country
 That gives us the right to be free
 But how could we be free
 When this country treats us very unequally
 They have us fund their wars
 So supposedly they can go spread democracy
 How can they go and do that
 When they don't even follow their own policies
 They pump fear into you
 And make you do things you don't wanna do
 Draft you in their infantries
 And cover up their lies saying it's the solid truth
 Now you tell me, "Who's right or wrong?"
 What business do we have in Iraq dropping them bombs
 I know it aint for all
 Or because they are imposing a threat
 Now if you can prove me wrong
 Step up and place your bet.

-Chimy, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We'd like to think that change first came about through dialogue. Dialogue that captured peoples attention and had them thinking on another level. Which then brought forth action that resulted in change. We'd also like to think that when one becomes aware, thinks and understands things on a different level, that change may be on the horizon. What are your thoughts on this? Obviously you're a confident young man that can think on his own! Knowing that you're feeding into what the system wants by being in your current situation, what thoughts now come to mind? Is there action on the horizon for you? We hope so because you have potential that can be better used out in society.

Hell Will Never End

Killing my feeling that's inside,
 Like being on a death roller coaster, enjoy the ride.
 Scared of death but really don't care,
 It's like playing a game of truth or dare.
 Doing what I can to enjoy life,
 I'm gambling my soul so roll the dice.
 I lost my soul and don't know what to do,
 Now I have to join the devil's crew.
 Blood shed through out my body,
 I've been beatin', neglected, and more so join the party.
 Death on my mind can't nobody stop it,
 I will rot in hell with the demon goblins.
 Pain and hurt after all I've been through,
 It's like I'm walking in the devil shoes.
 Can't believe what's going on in my head,
 A painted picture of half past dead.
 Don't see anything but evil and hatred,
 Can't paint a picture that's already been painted.
 They said the devil will ride for you 24-7,
 What they don't know where there's a hell there's a
 heaven.
 We choose to stick by the devil's side,
 As the morning falls, the night will rise.
 Violence on my mind, I haven't dealt with it all,
 Locked up behind these four walls.
 Blood drowns my body with a never ending flow of blood,
 See this is what I get for being a ruthless thug.

-Lil' Mainey The Prince, Alameda

From The Beat: This is a great piece of writing. You really put your artistic emotions on paper and let it all spill out and it came out as a very dark yet powerful masterpiece. You seem to make a connection that this isn't the place you want to be at, your own little hell/but why put your self in a situation where you are destined to fail/where there's a hell there's a heaven so go look for your place/ then you could look down and laugh at the devil in his face/repaint the picture of your future and create your own plan/all is not lost my young friend, so please understand.

Bad Apples

This is a new sunset
I paid my debt
And if I ever be killed
Then somebody push "reset"
Moving too fast on a jet
That you can't catch
But what's sex
If you worthless?
And my curse is
That I'm blessed
But they say
I am a pest in society
But who cries for me?
I just realized
That I am on my own
Four years of doing wrong
I deserve one shot to the dome
But I guess God don't want
Me to come home
He got my brains out here
Just let 'em roam
And all the people that I miss
They already gone
Shhh, it's crazy
How we babies makin' babies
Time is shady
If you a gangsta
Betta have ya .380
'Cause grim is gon' come knocking
Hoodied up in black robes
With yo' name and clock
Saying, "It's time to go"
Yo' time go
And this life we live
We already know we going
It's like the devil's the pimp
And we just hoeing
We all lost like leaves in the wind
Just blowing
Every day I feel like a different color
In the crayon box
Sometimes my thugs ask me if I'll rock
Until a ninja body drop
And fill up his chest
With bullets that's hot
But in the back of my mind
I know that the killings
Gotta stop
They got us thinking we sick
Just 'cause we holding the chop
We like they coin
That was planted into the crops
Sometimes the bugs will eat us inside out
Until we rot
My plan is to not drop off
That Bad Apple tree
So they can make cider
Out of me
Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: How do you manage to be so full of life and soul, when you're also so alone? You never exactly write, but only hint, about what your life is like on the outs, you only allow your readers to see your shadow. You write about the temptations the devil offers, like shooting people because someone feels like it or helping to create a baby just because someone can, that can have huge, often grave, permanent, even fatal, consequences in their lives. You do seem blessed, especially in having a vision and wisdom that is hugely unusual, especially for someone your age, but why do you call it a curse? Does being blessed require a huge responsibility of you, because you know what you're doing? Maybe being blessed also keeps you alive.

Equal Justice Under Law? Puh-leeze!

When the United States Constitution was erected by our forefathers – many, many moons ago – I would have never thought the present day police department and the United States justice system would not follow through. If I am correct, the United States Constitution states within the 14th amendment: "No state...shall deny any person within it's jurisdiction the EQUAL protection of the laws."

Sadly, it is clear and apparent to myself and many of the other minors incarcerated that justice has been denied to many of the citizens of the United States, but it disgusts me the most to see the behavior of the San Jose Police Department, as well as the San Jose State Police forces.

Since it is currently July, and school is no longer in session, adults and minors alike are going to want to be out of their homes and take time away from their jobs to enjoy downtown San Jose. There are many wonderful shops, eateries, and night clubs for everyone to enjoy, but many people are discouraged from going to these establishments. Why you ask? Because the SJPd and SJSUPd are constantly harassing EVERYONE DOWNTOWN – who are the ages of 21 and under! And if the person is of African American decent anywhere near drug hot spots Fountain Alley or Jack-in-the-Box, they are more likely to be cuffed and degraded by the arresting officer, unjustly frisked, and then – after things cannot get any worse – they are then arrested for loitering in the "Drug Zone."

Even girls such as myself, with no affiliation to the world of drugs, are subjected to the same treatment as the dealers. For example, SJUPD Officer Lee told me: "If you are going to be downtown then you are going to have to get used to getting stopped and "questioned" by the cops because we feel like stopping you." Then this "Officer" accused me of being a prostitute as well as a drug dealer. Not the business. As a United States citizen, I feel this harassment must be stopped and that no one, NO ONE deserves this, especially an underage girl.

Liberty and Justice for all? I think not.

-R, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a powerful indictment of the San Jose Police Department and are very impressed by your knowledge of the U.S. Constitution. The 14th Amendment was specifically made to allow former-slaves to have equal rights under the law after the Civil War – so your point about the continued racism of certain officers is especially strong. We think you would be a great lawyer.

One Real Tree

If I were to plant a seed
Feed it like these winos
Feed it like these bud fiends
Feed it like these smokers
My baby tree will come out messed up
As a young baby born

Whose mothers were feeding them the same stuff.
So my advice is, if you want a beautiful child, then quit your addiction. Every year children are brought to this world with a natural addiction. How sad! Use your mind before you ruin your child's.

-Pacheco, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Another truthful way of looking at things and/or life. Are you a child whose life was ruined by a parents drug use? What's interesting is that you mentioned using yourself in your other piece. Knowing that using is messing you up, doesn't this knowledge make you not want to use? We appreciate your honesty and hope you too can take your own advice.

Mr. Anger

Anger! (Breathe)

I saw him in his red suit.
Jumping up and down!
Tellin' me to blow up.

Mr. Anger in his burning red suit
I feel him spreading across my
Shoulders-
Filling my eyes.

Anger! (Take another breath)

The feeling that makes you SCREAM!!
Tha feeling that makes you shake.
The feeling that makes you cry,
When you know that you have no control
The feeling that makes you feel empty inside
The makes your go blank

Anger! (Let it go)

-Sweetest, Alameda

From The Beat: Man, this poem beats in your head like an angry drum. And then at the end, you let it come to silence with the best advice you could give - to let it go. Have you done that? Are you able to do that? Does writing help make it go away? What happened the last time Mr. Anger took the wheel?

Bad Father

Something I want to share with people in the Hall is that I had a kid at age 16, and now I'm almost 18 and gonna have another one. But I have not been there the whole time for my first. I don't even know it's name. But I do know that he's almost one, so yeah, and now with another lady.

I'm gonna have another one in January and I don't think it's gonna be different for it. So yeah, I'm a bad father and gonna be a bad father in the future. I just don't regret having either one, so yeah, their ain't nothing bad except not being there when the first was born and when the next one is gonna be. Now, I have two baby mamas and one lady that I really love, but now I don't know what to do with two kids and girls that I don't wanna be with. Oh well.

-Dough Boy, Santa Clara

From the Beat: We'd like to believe that under the cynical, uncaring tone of this piece is a caring, loving father who does want to be a part of his children's lives. First of all, love is a beautiful thing- BUT JUST USE A CONDOM! It's not rocket science. Secondly, you have missed the birth of your first child and maybe you'll miss the birth of your second child - but you don't have to miss the rest of their lives. We believe that you can be a good father in the future if you want to - and we know somewhere in there you DO want to.

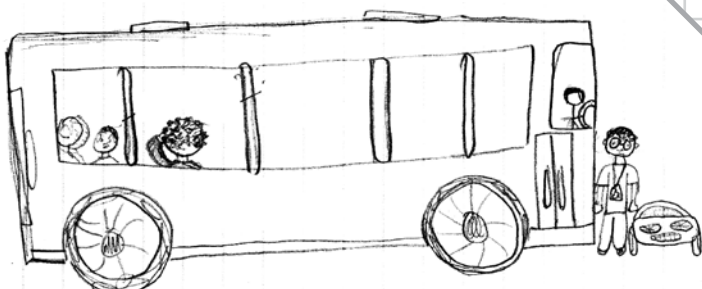
Back In Them Days

Wow, I remember back in the days when we was all young, little ass kids. It was a whole gang of us running 'round the back streets, playing football, scatterin' like roaches when someone would yell, "Car!" Ha, damn, them was the days.

We was kinda blind to what the older homies was really doin'. We saw it but wouldn't really process it. Wasn't worried 'bout no police, for real. But we was like family—everyone knew everyone. Some kept goin' on the street, others stepped out when they had the chance. It's too late now, because it's like jumpin' out a car goin' 100—you could, but it's not gonna be pretty. But we grew up, knowin' this, nothin' else. We can't stop, it's the life, my life.

-Birdman, San Francisco

From The Beat: Couldn't you consider your time at the Ranch a time out, like as if the car in your story has really slowed down, or stopped? Where is the life you're living going to take you, if you go back to it? Come on—can't you look at the alternatives your big homies took when they decided to get out the game? What else besides your life in the streets appeals to you? There's a whole 'nother world out there.



Them Days

The worst day I ever had was about three or four years ago. It was summer. Me and my cousins were chilling on my street, and we went to our park where we hang out at. We were playing handball and just playing around when some more of my friends came to chill wit' us. We all started to drink and smoke.

One of my cousins wanted to go to his house and shave all of our heads. So after a while we went to his house. One of my cousins cut his hair first, then me and my other cousin. Later on that night we were going to go eat at Little Caesars when we seen some guys. They were looking at us. My cousin said, "What are you looking at?" They said nothing when he said that.

When we were done eating at my house, we all walked back to my cousin's house. When we got on his block there was a carload of people on one side of the street. And another car that had its lights off. When we walked by them they didn't say anything. Then they all came out the car and went to the trunk and pulled out bars and bats. Then they yelled out, "What up, punks?" We all looked back and it was those guys from the pizza place. Then we started to go back toward them when one of them pulled out a gun. We ran behind some cars then they started to shoot at us. My cousins and I looked at each other and said we should run after they stopped shooting. When they stopped we ran as fast as we could to my cousin's house. When we got there everybody was scared. That was the worst day I had.

-Lil' G, Santa Clara

From The Beat: How easily a lightweight day can turn into tragedy! We are glad that nobody got hurt in this gunplay. You were right to be scared. Has that scary event made you change anything about your life?

Justice

You declare war and I declare peace
 I wish for love, you wish for hate
 I cry, you laugh
 I scream, you shout
 I ask for a hug, you ask for some cuts
 I ask for respect, you ask for hate
 I ask for a mother, you ask for nothing
 I ask for an angel, you ask for a demon
 I ask for heaven, you ask for hell
 I ask for a shiny day, you ask for a rainy day
 I ask for someone to talk to, you ask to be alone
 I ask for someone to love, you ask for someone to hate
 I ask for a puppy, you ask for a shark
 I ask to stop world hunger, you ask for more starvation
 I ask for freedom, you ask for more locked doors
 And I say no more asking but the voices inside my head
 just ask for justice.

-Angie, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, this is a really complex poem. It addresses many of the issues in the world - from peace to world hunger - but in the end, it is about our own personal struggles. Your poems keep getting stronger in each issue. Keep writing!

My Tree

If I were to be a tree, I would have planted a couple bad seeds (but who hasn't) and a couple good ones.
 If I planted a bad one, it would be in my career of crime. Because the limb (branch) that it created is just gonna break, will lead me nowhere and bring nothing good.
 But the good one would be that I planted a seed in my education, and that will get me anywhere and give me the skills to provide for my wife and children.
 I'm only a teen and I look where the bad seed has gotten me... Locked up in a cell. Fighting with my PO so he'll give me another chance at the ranch, instead of CYA.
 So plant some good seeds, and see where they lead you. I promise if you're reading this, they'll lead you somewhere better.

-Grinch, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We appreciate the good seeds that you have just planted in people's mind. You're right, we've all planted bad seeds in our time. What's good is that you see that now and see what comes from those seeds. Hopefully you continue to plant those good seeds for yourself and others, and trim off those bad limbs/branches when they show themselves.

Them Days

There are bad days and there are good days. Everyone goes through them, but that's part of life - to live through it - to experience the emotions of joy and sadness.
 People also have regular days, but that's daily. It's something everyone is used to. But good and bad days are what make life worth living. Everyone who goes through a bad day has gone through the worst and felt feelings of pain and loss and sadness and loneliness. And on good days people experience joy, laughter, fun, and many other positive feelings and reactions. That's life. And it will always go on. As those days pass they will become just another memory we store in our heads and hearts, just waiting to told to another. We've all had our days of good and bad, but that's life. It's something we go through that reminds us that: hey, you made it through the day, and you're OK. It tells us to live on and live life. Good days and bad days will forever be a part of our lives, and all we can do is move on, get through this day and wait for the next day to come, not knowing its outcome.

-John, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Hey John - you've stolen our thunder. You're quite the philosopher. We really don't know what more to say. You've said it all.

A Wild Ride

Cheating death, it scares me. Just thinking bout it, knowin' that I had four other lives in my hand. You know that sayin' think before you act; well I acted before I thought.

About a week before I got locked up, I was at a dance practice and I had my belt hanging. Some other punk ass gang members came and started banging on us. So I started banging back and they hopped out the car with bats, poles, knives, and a gun. We were fighting, then dude pulled a gun out, I chased after him and they hopped in the car.

I hopped in a different car and started chasing them and I was going over eighty miles per hour swerving through cars. The road started curving and the car started losing control and I smacked straight into a delivery truck. I flew from the driver's side all the way to the passenger side and my homeboy smacked his face into the window. The car jerked back the other way and I flew out the car and got up for a minute. I didn't know where I was at, then my homeboy hopped out and I told him to run 'cause I didn't want him to get caught. So I stayed and help the 12 year old boy and this 16 year old girl I was talking to out the car, they are brother and sister. So I helped the boy out and laid him on the ground 'cause he couldn't move. Then I was trying to wake up the girl, but she was knocked out so I broke the window and pulled her out and she woke up crying. Her brother grabbed me and told me don't leave, so I stayed until the fire truck got there and then I left to get the mom. The cops found me at her house but I didn't get locked up. Thank God.

-Nuckles, Alameda

From The Beat: Wow! This is a story filled with plenty of excitement, that sadly didn't need to start in the first place. How do you feel about cheating death? Not just your own life but the lives of other innocent people you didn't know? Was it worth it? Everybody wants to think before they act but at times our adrenaline gets the better of us and we can't control our actions. The way you respond to the action is what makes the difference. Although what got you in the situation itself is a dumb reason, how you ended up handling the situation is a great thing to do. We hope with this new outlook on life, you will begin a new chapter.

Looking Back...

Looking back on the happiest day of my life will always put smile on my face and happiness in my heart. November 20th, 2006 was a day that will never be forgotten by me or my family.

It was any normal day, just hanging out with my friends and doing the thing a young man my age should not be doing. I was on my way home and I called my mom telling her I was on my way home. She was also informing me that she was also on her way home. Before she said her goodbyes and I love you's she told me I had a piece of mail on my dresser.

With my mind in oblivion and my nerves rattling, I still made my way home with ever footstep feeling like I was sinking in quick sand. As I reached my bedroom door I was still hesitant about opening my piece of mystery mail. Well after waiting about 15-20 minutes I decided on opening it. Wow! Was I surprised to look at once sentence that changed my life from then on. I was jumping, yelling, and telling myself on the inside I knew you can do it. After my heart calmed down and I got my breath I called my mom and told her the good news then it was her turn to celebrate and she told me "Son I'm proud of you."

And that was the happiest day of my life because it was the day I received my GED.

-Doug E. Fresh, Alameda

From The Beat: We hope this triumph is the first of many - from GED to College degree to PhD to family to giving it back to the community. Peace and our best hopes for a brighter future: You deserve it.

Still Thinkin'

My mind is stressen
wondering if I'm under depression.
All my thoughts and memories passing me like forgotten
commercials,
still trying to figure out if I'm living a movie or is this my
real life that I'm destroying. Can't see my future 'cause
it's being destroyed like the speed of light
wondering if I'll ever see day of light.
Sitting between these four walls busting down to the
neck getting ready for the Y,
thinking of my lady's voice
always saying, "baby do right please do right so we can
be together."
Thinkin' if I should think of another lie to tell the fam
so they believe that I'm going to do right this time when
I get out.
Hoping they don't give my bra that 50 years with a L
saying there's nothing I can do now
thinking like damn I'm really going to the next step.
With 8 years
with a strike and parole
wondering when I get out if I'm going to do what I used
to.
Still thinkin' is this my life or is it a movie?

-Vee, Alameda

From The Beat: All isn't over yet. You still got a long way to go, and even with the amount of time given to you, your future is still there. You have many talents and are very bright, which can get you a long way. Life is the real deal, not a movie, but make your own decisions and in the end, you will have a happy ending.

My Heart

When my heart turns cold can't nobody stop me
It causes my soul to freeze
It spreads throughout my spirit
I become my own enemy
I'm blind, I can't see.
In a box where I can't feel no love
And until you can't feel anything at all it's cold
My friend's crying don't mean nothing to me
My cries are not tears but blood streaming
Am I dead? I can't feel nothing. Where am I going?
Me not being there for moms
Is pain to me.
Loneliness becomes my routine friend
Sleeping to me is never pleasant
If I do sleep, the world and the reasons don't mean
anything
All I hear is voices
That are rude to me, they are pulling my legs
You don't understand, I am getting angry, quit the games
You don't understand how I am, you been watching me
Just wait and see when my heart turns cold
And hate is out of me and I can't control
Please wake me when I'm free
I can't get up, you are not the person I need
My body is all numb
Can somebody help me
My heart is bleeding
There is a lot of things in my head
What do I do? I can't explain.
God, can You come save me?

-Lucero, San Francisco

From The Beat: You say that nobody can stop you when your heart turns cold, but that's not exactly true. You can stop yourself — and you must if you want to escape this cold world of locked doors. God has given you all the tools you need to save yourself — a good brain, skills to express yourself, a clear mind to know what leads to a better future and what leads back to lock-up! Are your eyes open to that?

Wrong Laws

Wassup wit' it Beat? It's the one and only Chuccy coming through wit' some more writing for you. Today my subject will be on the equal justice of law. The way I see it, I don't think everyone is treated equal. Especially in the State of California; their law Constitution is whack. Towards us gang bangers, it's like they always try to keep us down the longest possible. It's very rare seeing a gang member getting a chance.

For an example, look at Paris Hilton. She only did a few weeks and was let out because of her fear in jail. If I would've done that, they would've probably at least gave me a few months. Why? Just because I gang bang. These laws ain't far to us.

Like another example is our probation laws. We can't even chill on certain blocks, or even post up with the homies just because they are gang members. You can go to jail for it, too, if you don't follow the laws. Like me, the people I did the crime with I can't have no contact whatsoever.

These laws are whack! Maybe if I didn't gangbang I would probably be out already. That's how I feel about the law.

Well Beat, Chuccy's out. That's all I gots to say on this subject.

-Chuccy, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We agree with half of your analysis. We don't think it's fair to make laws against you because you are a gang member or to tell you where you can or can't gather because of that status. Yes, we think that is an unfair application of the law. But, at the same time, you have to own up to your own responsibilities for the actions that led you here. In other words, if you break the law, then you can expect the law's consequences. Those consequences might be harsher on certain people than others (because of things like gang banging, race or wealth), but the only way to avoid the consequences altogether is to avoid breaking the law. If you can't do that, all your complaints won't change what you'll have to face.

I Stress

I make myself stress because I get myself locked up.
I stress 'cause I take my own freedom away.
I stress cause I don't see the people I love in months.
I stress because I am not at home eating real food, but
instead I'm eating county food out of trays.
I stress 'cause I know I can do better.

The things that help me ease my stress is reading and writing -- when I read it puts my mind to a whole other place, and at the same time I learn, my reading gets better. When I write I get all my stress/ problems on the paper.

-Ryan, Alameda

From The Beat: Awesome — and of all these stresses one of them is a blessing in disguise: The voice telling you that you can do better... follow that voice, it will lead you to success As for reading and writing, remember even when you get out, your writing will always have a home in The Beat.

My First Day In Juvenile Hall

My first day in Juvenile Hall was the worst day in my life. I woke up feeling out of place because this place is not my home. I want to go home. I hate it here! This place makes me feel stressed, something that I'm not that used to. I can't eat, or sleep because there is no one here to make me feel loved, secure, or safe like I would feel at home. My first day in Juvenile Hall is what I can truly call a living day in hell... and after this time, I can assure you there will be no other time.

-Lechell, San Francisco

From The Beat: You're passionate enough to make us believe your promise that you'll never be back! But it really doesn't matter whether we believe you or not. Words don't matter at all. Only action. So what "actions" do you plan to address in order to keep that promise?

My Race

We wanna see a black man break it,
But in the trials and tribulations the white man takes it,
Until then we gotta fake it till we make it,
I'm talking about the circle that separate me from you,
Because of my race they won't let me say what I have to say,

So they put us in a society where it just us,
Give us poor jobs, gotta pay bills, so we gotta get on the bus,
You drive your nice new 2007 dodge charger yea that's cool,

You' parent even give you money for your school,
While we in public schools learnin' why we are here,
They tell us because the white man pays you to stay away each year,

We are only heard through our nice soundin' music,
We relate to what they say because they've been through it,

From the bottom to the top, and from the left to the right,

We try to make it whichever way, but try to ditch the white,

Because once they got you it's over,
Back to the hood havin' to look over your shoulder,
I don't want that, do you,

Like I said it's a circle and we have to break through.

-Mike, Alameda

From The Beat: Absolutely! And now you must ask yourself "how." How to get what you deserve, how to seize an education, a job, a challenge, an opportunity. If you're born in the wrong place, the wrong income level, the wrong situation, it's harder to get there. But we said harder, not impossible. So use that poetry and wisdom inside you to tell us how.

*If I get caught doing stuff and
I get locked up, I feel it happens
for a reason. In the long run I'm
being blessed.*

Life As A Young Man

My life as a young man is hard. Because I come from a single mom.

I lost my sister to a heart problem. As that happen my life became harder and harder. I start being a person that was a pain.

As I became older I lost my understanding with my mom. I start hanging out late, start not listening, start selling drugs, start popping pills. The reason I start doing this is because my sister died. Then my mom started crying a lot, and my family started to turn on each other. Then I started saying I have to teach myself how to be a man.

When I turned 15 years old I started carrying guns. Then I start smoking weed. Then I start coming to juvenile hall. Now I am in here for a robbery I didn't do, but you can't tell the police nothing. Life is hard, especially being young and coming from Oakland, California.

-Reese, Alameda

From The Beat: Life is only as hard as you make it. Life is hard any where for anyone of any race, gender, and age, but it doesn't have to be. Yeah you might have to struggle, but all those obstacles you face in life will only make you a better person in the end, if you wish to change. Excellent thoughtful piece!

Advantages, Disadvantages Of Being A Criminal

I don't feel I have any advantages by being a criminal. I don't look at what I do as being lucky or having bad luck, I'm blessed by God. I don't feel I get away with stuff, I feel I'm blessed. If I get caught doing stuff and I get locked up, I feel it happens for a reason. In the long run I'm being blessed.

But when you're a criminal you get respect from other people who are criminals. You also get money. You get all the material things people want. You can look like the people in the videos. You can be a BET ninja.

See, when people look inside this box while they're standing inside theirs, it might look good and you wanna be wit' it, but when they step in, they see what it really is — shooting, jail, police, drama, drama. Everything that shine ain't gold.

-The Dude, San Francisco

From The Beat: You are right, not everything that shines is gold. So, if there are no advantages to being a criminal, then why would you put yourself in that box that you are in? Why? Isn't because you want respect from other criminals, and money and material things to look like the people on BET? If this is a blessing, how are you planning to use it to your advantage?

The System's Answer To Gang Banging

Being with the homies

Kickin' it at the block

Kickin' it at the park

Is what I call the time of my life

There's good times

That you'll always have part of

And you'll want to have 'em over and over

But when bad times slide through

Shhh...

The disgustin' system calls us out

As for now, I'm a ward of the court

Just like other homies and homegirls

We're charged with...

"Gang Enhancement"

Four years of registration

And more time given to do

Before you eva see freedom

-Stephanie, San Francisco

From The Beat: Are the good times worth the consequences you're living right now? If the answer is yes, then when will those consequences get serious enough to lead you to other ways to have good times?

Why Do They Lie?

Why do they lie to the little boy?

Who is lost and all alone.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

Who is abandoned without his own.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

He cries himself to sleep.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

He never play for keeps.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

Who know hurt and pain so well.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

He dies again and again.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

A good boy he tries to be.

Why do they lie to the little boy?

He cries so hard inside of me.

-Alebo, Alameda

From The Beat: Man, when you called yourself a poet, you weren't kidding around, were you? This is moving and heartfelt, and it makes us even more excited to read that book you're working on ... bring it on, The Beat is ready.

My Life Is One Of The Hardest

If we change places, I would learn the harder part of your life, like problems in your life. But if you were in my shoes, you would see that my life is one of the hardest.

Most of the people in my life that have died, have died in my arms. And now I have a kid that I only seen once for a couple of days. Then I got locked up 'cause of my wife. Every time she gets mad 'cause I won't tell her where I was, 'cause I was doing something bad. She would flip out and tell my PO. Now I'm locked up again.

Mom is having another kid. My brothers are getting into trouble and beat on 'cause of what I have done in the past. Try living in these shoes, where everything dies, or gets hurt, it's all your fault and you can't do anything about it. Try that for a change. And I have money, cars, house, wife, kids, bills to pay, plus a lot of problems in my life. So, late.

-Lil Dreamer

From The Beat: That definitely sounds like a very hard life to live. Now that you know exactly what you're working with, what are some of the solutions that you have come up with? We can sit here and compare lives, or we can come up with solutions to change the chaos that our lives are surrounded with. From what you've shared, you definitely have a lot to lose materialistically. But more importantly is the bond with your child, who is totally innocent and will look to you for guidance. What can you do to better your life, that really means bettering the life of your child? Is it worth it to you? We certainly hope so but actions speak louder than words!

Exodus

America is the most violent nation around. It's sad what we've become. We've far past the point of no return, and now we're spiraling out of control. It's in our music, TV, movies, on our streets, in comic books, video games, etc. How to stop this is beyond me, but it's destroying us. And the worst part is that, because this violence is everywhere, our children learn to accept it and fall in line. More Americans die from stress than in any other country.

Well my time is up, I'm leaving. This piece is pretty weak, but here it is.

-Monk, Santa Clara

From The Beat: On the contrary, we don't feel this piece is weak at all. We liked what you had to say and feel that most of it has some truth behind it. If you think that we're at "the point of no return," what do we do then? Do we just give up? Since you know what's going on, so to speak, do you now find yourself being more conscience of what you do and how you do it? How do you avoid some of what's going on all around us? Do you think by bringing this to people's awareness is helping in combating what's going on? If not, what are some other things you think would help humanities cause?

Equal Justice Under Law

I'm going to tell y'all before I start that I'm kind of going off topic but on the same idea.

Equal Justice under law sounds good, but not if you Black or Latino. If you black or brown, they don't give you equal Justice. They say "innocent until proven guilty," but in this system, if you're Black or Brown, you're "guilty until proven innocent."

They make you sit in the hall just waiting to go to the holding cell. (I say that 'cause they push your court back and back; you be in the holding cell for 30 minutes to an hour, then go into court, and soon as you sit down, you getting back up waiting on your next court date.) But I seen white people and Asian came in Max and get out the same day or the same week.

- Gold M, San Francisco

From The Beat: We certainly agree with you that racism still infects the justice system (and most other "systems" in this country). But having money may be an even bigger factor than race. If you're rich — whatever your color — you can get the best legal services that money can buy. But if you're poor...

Love Living Dangerously

People always ask me why I don't change my life around and stop doing what I do and go the right path. Some people ask me why I am so hard headed. I really don't know why I keep on going to the 'hood chilling, making that fast money. I just love it. I love living dangerous. It turns me on when I smash on an enemy. When people talk about me bad or good, it don't matter. They just making me famous.

I been through a lot that if another person goes through it, they might change their life. I met people that get locked up their first time. They only do one month and all of a sudden they don't want to bang. Not me. I just finished doing two years and I'm still banging. I got stabbed five times. Still doing it. I got shot three times. Sill banging. It's nothing for me.

I live life to the fullest. I know it's not right, and sometimes I think it could be better if I wasn't this way so I could go to places, But hey, what can I say? I got the heart of a "BEAR" and can't be stopped. But maybe if I had a down-ass girl that would be with me at bad and good times and someone I could have fun with, I probably won't be doing that much destruction. But I don't I know. She's out there somewhere, I just got to keep looking. For all the homeboy and home girls, much respect.

-Big Oso, San Francisco

From The Beat: Maybe you do need a girl to slow you down! You say you can't be stopped, but that's nonsense. There are already more than two million people in this country (and nearly 200,000 in California alone) who are stopped by the bars and walls that surround them! Is being told when to eat "living life to the fullest?" Is being told that "talk is dead" living life to the fullest? Is wearing the next boy's underwear "living life to the fullest?" We're sure you've had homies, and even family loved ones pass away. Is that what you want? Is dying in your teens "living life to the fullest?" Think about this: If that girl you're looking for and you were to have a child, would you continue the lifestyle that's led you here? We'd love for you to take that on as a topic...

They make you sit in the hall just waiting to go to the holding cell.

Think About It

What's up Beat, this is your boy, Turk. But anyways, I want to talk about the killing surge in Oakland. I'm gonna tell you like it is, because I grew up in Oakland, but right now I'm in Alameda County Juvenile Hall for a 187 that I did not have anything to do with. But yes, 90 percent of the reason people are dying is because of ecstasy, aka Thizz. Because the drug is powerful. It takes your mind away to another world.

Just think about an angry teenager on four or five pills with a gun. He's with his friends. They are all off pills and other drugs like weed and Robo'. What do you think when this teenager gets into an argument with someone? His mind is not in the right place, his friends is there eggin' him on.

I knew a person who shot someone else nine times. While he was in jail he called my house, and I asked him why he did it.

He said "I was off a pill, mad as hell!"

Think about it.

-Turk, Alameda

From The Beat: We've been thinking about it, and this piece makes us think about it even more. It's a terrible thing to imagine, and you did a great job putting us in the mind-frame of a young person who might in other cases be a good human being suddenly being in a position where he's ready to do evil. Congratulations to you for stepping up and sharing your experience and insights. We hope nothing like this every happens to you, on either side of that bullet.

Get Out Of My Dreams!

I gotta brake this; you cannot be a part of me
 I gotta let you go
 Even if it means leaving my mom alone
 She would be happy and not stress of me
 She strong, she could move on
 So let go, you cannot be my everyday routine
 Stop hitting me stop
 Stop treating me like this
 Just kill me so I can be
 My mom and brother guardian angel
 You need to stop making me lonely,
 broken heart, and treating me dirty
 Why did you go that far?
 I can't be with you
 That would rip me apart
 You gave me bruises, black eyes, and pain
 Leave me alone you took my heart and stepped on it
 Then gave it away.
 Please stop coming into my dreams and controlling me.
 You are my past you left a hole in me
 This is what you did to me
 I hate you and the people that treated me like shhh and
 took advantage of me
 My heart is cold
 I'm angry and I can't be happy anymore
 Always running through my mind of what every little
 thing you did
 Made me feel ugly, and blind. Why?
 But I guess the memories would never go
 because that's what I needed to learn.
 To stand up for myself and fight.
 So please wake me up so I could get out of my dream.
 That's why I'm here 'cause my anger took advantage of
 me.
 I can't talk about my history
 All I want to do is fight or go away to be alone
 And get it out of my mind.
 Thank you Beat for at least reading this
 I ain't got no more tears to shed
 But I got anger to spread
 That I just want to be dead
 Hope my mom come to visit me so I could live again.

-Lucero, San Francisco

From The Beat: No one should be allowed to hurt you, hit you, black your eyes or any of that kind of child abuse, and we don't care who did it — it's a crime! But you now have the burden of putting that criminal abuse behind you to the extent that doesn't haunt you. Stop focusing on this person. Stop thinking about this person. Stop trying to reason with this person, even if you're only doing it on paper. The way to forget is to focus on your future, to think about the kind of person you'd like to spend time with, and to do those things you need to do to move your life forward and out of this place!

This Morning

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window, so I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door, opened my door and.....ended up incarcerated wishing I never left out that door.
 Now I'm waking up to morning calls demanding I wakeup. Demanding I obey any and every instruction, Man, how I wish I listened to my parents or at least hear them out. Now anyone with an Alameda County badge and pepper spray plays the role of parents.

-Lost child, Alameda

From The Beat: Sometimes waking up isn't the best thing for some people, because in dreams you are whoever and wherever you want to be, but in reality, things aren't so good. Do you want to live like this for more of days? Do you want to have somebody who isn't your parent demand you to do things, order you when to do things? Wake up tomorrow to a better life.

Why Can't...

When I turn on my TV I see white people talking about other people's lives. Or just being nosey and in other people's business. For example, Jerry Springer or any other stupid show... Why can't they show more about the starving kids in Africa? Or what's going on in Iraq, or just little things? Also, there are schools that need more money, or programs that are really helping kids. Why can't the TV people talk about them.

That's all I got to say... May God bless all of us!

-Asian Guy, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Sometimes TV does show some of those other more relevant subjects. Maybe you've just been watching the wrong stations. It's basically up to you to find those programs that are more interesting to you than others. Because a lot of times that's not what the majority want to watch. Or, it also may not be what the TV people get their higher ratings from. You could also put yourself in a position to create more of these shows that you may feel are more relevant.

But Yet I Am Not A Beast

This ain't no new theory
 They been doing it
 Just like we swallow beef
 'Cause we been chewing it
 But yet I am not a beast
 Taught to go after everything that glitters
 And the fake fame
 Like we playing Nintendo
 But it's really a fake game
 Gold teeth ain't real
 And we still rocking fake chains
 But, yet, I am not a beast
 I don't care if it was traffic
 I'd get out the car
 'Cause I am a beast
 But in my medulla
 I know it's gotta cease
 Hot souls beg for peace
 But like mouthwash
 We gotta reach
 Who will teach?
 But how can you teach
 Without no teacher?
 And to find
 You gotta be a seeker
 I am not saying
 That ice can't melt
 We shoot each other
 Because how we felt
 Dangerous things can fly
 When you don't swallow your pride
 And if cursed with this gift
 Then I will defeat the beast
 For to gain, you gotta experience
 But I have clearance
 No matter who dies
 Angels still surround me
 And I locked the beast away
 So Jesus can crown me
 But yet
 I am not a beast

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: You sound like you have to use all your powers to conquer the beast in yourself. Do you think that's true for everybody, or just you? How do you control your beast? What brings him out in you? Does he just hide himself in you, or does he ever go away for good? What forms does he take in your life? What temptations does he create in you? What experiences have you had because he got free within you? Do you have any advice for others who have trouble with their beasts inside?

Why You Cousin?

I'm in here, stressed out in here, because I called my mom on the fourth of July to tell my little brother happy birthday, but my mom told me she was not with him. I couldn't think of a reason why she wouldn't be with her son on his birthday. But then she started to tell me she was at her sister's house trying to calm them down.

So I'm sitting here thinking what could be so bad that she had to drive all the way across the bay bridge to her sister's house when she should be with my brother for his birthday.

Then she starts to tell me the cops found my cousin Jerry dead. My mom said the cops said that he was playing with a gun and he shot himself. If you ask me, that some bullshhh.

Now at night I can't even go to sleep with out thinking about it all damn night. My cousin was a teenager when he died. Now I know how ninjas be feeling when they tell me they cousin died.

My brother was at his house with dad. He threw him a birthday party at Chucky Cheese. Good thing he was all right.

-Cody, Alameda

From The Beat: It's always hard when a loved one moves on, especially a close one in that case. It shocks us when they die so young, and as in your case, you have to find out in the hardest way imaginable. Not being able to comfort your other relatives must be a pain indescribable. How do you think your brother felt that his cousin passed on his birthday? It's crazy how the world works, on a day of pure joy and happiness, such a tragic accident has to happen and leave you with a hole in your life. Rest in Peace Jerry. We'd love to hear your thoughts on guns.

Feel Like Myself Rotting Away

Originating from a middle upper class family in a quiet small town, I was extremely upset when I entered juvenile hall. I sat by the window staring at the gray piece of plastic, stuck over the glass, blocking all sights from your view. Even though I have only been in this place a couple of days, I feel as if I am rotting away.

My past schools have always been elite, top-notch institutions. So the schooling I have received in here has not been much of a challenge. I understand that I made a mistake and picked the wrong friends, but at the same time, I desperately want to leave this place. So I can actually revamp my life. Living here I can practically feel myself rotting away.

I try to work my mind by playing "Sudoku," reading novels, and reciting the multiplication table backwards and forwards. I want to keep a journal, so I can write down my thoughts and my to-do list of what I want, or need to do when I'm out of here. But it seems like I'm restricted from everything and anything that I want to do.

I'm a newbie first-timer here, so I don't get access to anything. For example, keeping pencils or combs is against the rules. And getting searched after every visit, or interview is a regular thing.

I never ever thought in my wildest dreams that I would end up in juvenile hall, but life throws you curve balls and you just have to roll with it.

Keep your head up high and shoulders back. Suck up the pain and just keep hope. (To Be Continued...)

-K, Santa Clara

From The Beat: From the sound of things, you're doing everything you can to keep your mind and time occupied. We don't know why you're there, but for you to reflect on things, what do you think was the cause of you getting there? That may be one of the first things you might want to do on your to-do list. That way you'll know what not to do. You sound and write educated enough to figure this out, and hopefully avoid making the same mistake. In time that feeling you're having will pass. All you can do for now is take your own advice, "keep your head up high and shoulders back" and "just keep hope."

Out There

Graze

Just don't blaze

Taught to kill now

But that was not how

We was raised

I remember peace

Back in the days

Now we off the pill

Acting craze

It never stops

I could go on for days

It's crazy

How we'll kill a man

Who look just like us

Playing with guns

Like kids in Toys R Us

Take a step back

And look at us

We think it's cool

How we got little babies out there

Ready to bust

Devil got us thinking

To survive to kill

Is a must

But to me, all this smell

Like a bunch of musk

We walking on mold

At the bottom of our feet

Call it crust

Taught to never trust

But I gotta make it

Even if it means

Running through this world naked

When opportunity shows itself

I am a rape it

Driven by the loss of my mother

Without that

I would have no cover

I guess I gotta start

The cycle over

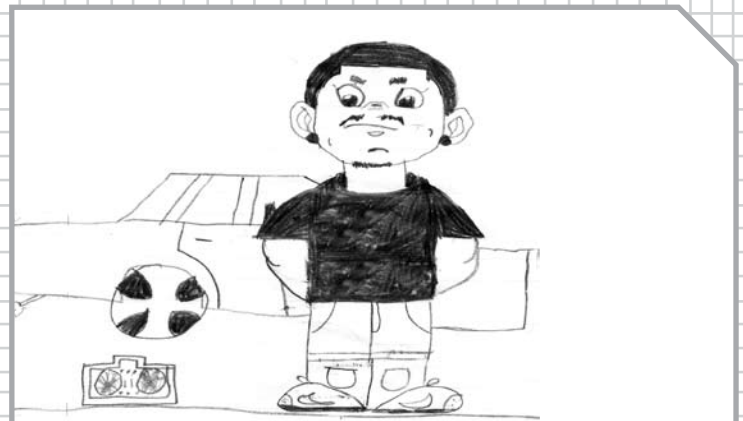
But, first

I gotta find a lover

Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: You write about the racial suicide of your people. Yes, Black people are killing Black people, and everybody knows it's a tragedy, everybody, not just Black people, truly grieve, but nobody seems to know what to do to stop it. You write from the inside, from the streets, so what do you see causing this self-slaughter of your own? Since most of you know what you're doing, why can't or doesn't anyone or everyone stop it? Or would it take everyone in the streets agreeing to call a truce at the same time? Could that be possible? Why or why not?



The Reason

Why the murder rate in Oakland is going up? That's a good question. I would say that it's going up because the youth today don't care about anything. They just want to live their life having fun. Sometimes fun for them is going to parties and drinkin' and doing drugs and having sex.

They hang out with people who do this. Next thing you know somebody wants to act the fool, and then act hard a problems hard, because somebody had too much of a drug.

People get into it. Somebody gets beat. Retaliation starts. One dies, they pay back, three or five more, their friends, family, people that just say hello, and the rate goes up. Not just one incident, but many. All because someone couldn't handle a drug and acted stupid.

-Slick

From The Beat: Why do you think youth these days are more careless than before? Why can't someone end the cycle? Youth tend to follow and things because of peer pressure, is this also a reason for the murder rate increasing?

Always Thinking

Always thinking about my future, my case, and my life.

Always thinking about my family and friends praying that they okay.

I think about my case and what's going to happen, is I'm going home, and what I'm going to do when I get there.

I think about how can I get my money and do my own thing.

I think about school and if I'm going to go back or not, Am I going to do the same thang or change like I'm planning to.

I'm not sure about things just still thinking.

-Marcus

From The Beat: Thinking is a start to everything. If you really ponder all of the circumstances going on in your life and case, then you might actually want to change. Change for the better and I can assure you things will be better for you in the end.

How I See It

No I don't think it's the pills,
it's the music and the gangs that makes people go crazy,

people tries to act harder then the next person
then someone says the wrong thing and gets smoked or stabbed.

There are too many people with bad attitudes, and
people think it's cool.

But it's really not. It's hard because of how hard it hit
people.

It's the peer pressure, too many people do too much,
like they're better then the next man;
how I see it they can both get smoked.

It's kind of no reason to put your wonderful life through
it.

More people should learn more about God.
Because that's the only thing we're going to have at the
end.

That's what people have to learn.

-G Gonzo

From The Beat: There are a lot of factors that's involved in the crime rate going up. Too many people just want to make a name for them selves, and by doing that they take a name away from this earth. What about for the people who do not believe in god? What do they have at the end?

This Morning

I woke up thing morning, the sun beaming through room ten window. So I got up and washed up and looked at my food. It looked so bad that I could not eat. So I go to school on an empty stomach. I can't think so I get kicked out of class. Now I'm back in my room. Now it's time to eat, but I don't want to eat, but I have to.

-Donald

From The Beat: Waking up to such a bad environment could cause anyone to go mad. The meals probably taste as bad as they look. Then having to go to school on an empty stomach must be horrible. All those rules must drive you insane. But time will go by and you will soon be out with your loved ones. Its your decision if you want to stay out or not.

Hard Times

Hard times got a man going crazy

But I still got to thank the Lord that He made me.

This ain't right 'cause my life is filled with pain

So I'm gonna try my best to try to explain

I made a couple of poor decisions

Once you get locked up you know what you been
missing.

People taking lives ain't no more coming back.

You doing 25 to an L and that's a fact.

But people ain't tripping and people ain't thinking

So they do what they do and ain't listening.

So hard times got me going insane

But I'm still out here trying to maintain

With this world filled with hate, lies, and pain.

So my life is official,

People don't feel like a man unless they have a pistol.

-Baby Q

From The Beat: Your rhymes are real and you spit the truth/ Being in jail must have you feeling aloof/ Don't become a statistic and follow the trend/ Your going straight while they are trying to make you bend/ Stay positive and you'll be home in no time/ Just make sure you stay between the lines!

Everybody Want

Everybody want the same thing that one person got.
If somebody got hella shhh like rims, cars, hoes, other
people think that they living a decent life, but they really
not. It's hard work, what they don't know is you have to
do hella damage to get where you at, you gotta stamp a
couple of people and let them know you ain't playing. You
serious for you can live your life.

-Demarco

From The Beat: Why do people like showing off material things? Isn't that, in a reason itself that problems start? One person gets jealous of the next and then they start arguing. The arguing then escalates and we have a non stop cycle.

Think

Right now my mind is void,

Like all of my intelligible thoughts have been destroyed,

I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place,

Going about life with a scarred face,

Because the system doesn't want to disregard race,

They want us with shackles around our waist,

And we're helping them by letting our talents go to
waste,

My ninjas and females let's be smart,

Because we could never finish what we never do start.

-Fat Wayne

From The Beat: Why do you help the system? If you realize you have all the talents and intelligible thoughts, why are you sitting in jail? You have a great ability to write and are very intellectual, but it can never reach its actual potential while sitting behind bars. Don't let your great talents go to waste.

Why I Love Thugging

"Thuggin' is my life"

So we say

But thuggin' is yo'

life slippin' away

I was born a thug

And also raised

So I bang 'till the end

Y'all gon' hear my name

Staying out late with a gallon of Heem

Posted on the spot serving junkies and fiends

Lost a few family and friends to the subject at hand

But I still love the shhh

What a shame what a shame

Is it money that I love

Or the pistols and pearl

Or is the American dream

To take over the world

Even though I love thuggin'

'Till I'm laid in the dirt

But I'm givin' up the game

And it's so hard to do

But I'm thinking about my life

And my mom seeing me through

LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD.

-Lil' Sheiking

From The Beat: It's hard to give up the game because you don't yet know how good the new game is going to be: The game where you can win, take care of your family, stop stressing over 5-0, travel around the world, learn new languages, and walk with pride and self-respect. All that talent and heart that flowed into this poem can also flow right into the New Game of your life.

Prayer

Prayer is like an order or something: You have to wait on it...it's not something that happens in a blink of an eye. I found that out when I prayed for my grandfather.

But prayer works in very different ways. Sometime it works in your favor, most of the time it doesn't work in your best interest, but my lesson was that it always works.

-Lil' Son

From The Beat: Another thing about prayer is that when you pray, you are asking, from the deepest and truest part of yourself, for the things that matter the most to you: freedom, peace, a chance for happiness for yourself and your loved ones. The question is not only whether your prayers can be answered from above, but also whether or not you are doing all you can to answer them down here below: They say God helps the one who helps himself....

Television

I turned on the TV and looked at music videos and be wishing that I was that famous and wish I could blow up like that and the money and the whips. To end up like that is to find a producer and tell him I got skills and if he can do something with me.

Ever since I was little and use to look at hella videos and use to look at all they moves and start practicing how to dance then I start going to talent shows and winning dance contests.

-Anthony

From The Beat: It's amazing that you have this gift and talent for dance. We hope you keep going with it - and continue to take classes and practicing. Dance is the oldest human art form... you're like a painter but you use your own self as paint and canvas. One day we hope to see you perform on stage!

Racists with Black People and Whites

When I turned on the TV I saw black people and white people were going against each other. Black people were dying and black people were getting hung from their necks. And back then we were slaves and we was getting whooped with whips. We had to sit at the back of the bus and the white people had to sit in the front of the bus.

And I heard that white people was really racists back then. Black people couldn't walk on the same side as the whites and we couldn't go to the same school as the white and we should not drink from the same fountain as the whites.

-Lil' Saint

From The Beat: Sounds like you turned to one of those rare TV shows that was dropping serious knowledge. And yes, the history of black Americans is one that is full of racism and injustice, but it's also a history you can be proud of, because every freedom and right that the black community has now comes from the bravery and determination and pride of people who said "NO, we are going to fight for what's right." That fight isn't over yet, however. ... and it's up to the next generation to continue. You have a role to play in the struggle too, because we are all a part of history. What will that role be?

First They Put Us To Work...

What I don't like about cops? It's that they expect you to go to school and get a job. Like my favorite singer says, "first they put us to work then they throw us in jail like animals, they put us in cages". Man, I was working, living my life with my little bro Sammy and little sis Marilyn, next thing I know I ended up in here. But I can't let that put me down. Lock down like animals.

-Bones

From The Beat: What kind of work were you doing when you got arrested? If it was illegal activity, then you can't be surprised that you got arrested. If it wasn't, then what can you do when you get released to avoid getting swallowed up by the system? Even if you admire your favorite singer, it doesn't mean you have to give up your life to the story he tells... Break the mold.

The Pain I Put You Thru

The sound of her voice make me feel safe

The warmth of her hugs, no one can take her place

So why do I hurt her so much

I'm sorry not even going to front

Now I'm here at camp away from you

I can't believe all the shhh I put you thru.

Mom I know it hurt to have a son as a banger

You at home when I put life constantly in danger

but I try, I really do, because I never meant to hurt you, but mama just remember I'm sorry for all this mess because mama for you as my mom I'm truly blessed.

-Big Box

From The Beat: This poem is so moving, and really gave us a feel for that love your mom has for you - and we believe that you mean every word you say. But if you're truly sorry for what you've done, you must also have a plan for how to make sure you'll never do it again, so tell us: What's your plan?

Every Day At Camp

Every time I wake up in Camp, I think about what I'm going to do that day. You know...was up, brush my teeth, make my bed and that's basically it.

I go to the kitchen, make the food and then serve it. Then I clean up. After that I go to class. Then it's lunch. Next we go to rec or sleep. Then we wake up and go to dinner. After dinner we go to rec. and shower then we go to sleep.

But a few more days of this and I go on my home visit. I plan to see my girl.

-Deary

From The Beat: One day you'll have a much more interesting schedule than this, as you grow into adulthood, get out of the system, and start taking over your own life.

Sup Wit Da Beat!

This Lil' D can't wait to get released from Camp Sweeney and when I do get released I'm gonna make sure I stay free but you feel me if I get caught up I'ma have to deal with my time just like a man would. So you feel me do what you do and stay free. So for you who running yo' mouth stay away from me. Lil' D not getting caught up ever again.

But what I'm gonna do to never get caught up again is start wiggling on you marks and never mess with you again ...probably get a job or two, get my check or whatever and quit like I should you feel me?

I had to write something good once in a while 'cause they wasn't putting my writings in the books, so what I'm gonna do is stay out of trouble fast, Lil' D out this thang.

-Lil' D

From The Beat: Right on Lil D! But a heads up: We don't just ask you to write positive for publication, we ask you to write positive because you are a bright talented individual with a lot to teach and a lot to say, and to tell you the truth what you write is a lot less important to us than how you live. Because we want to see you live long, live free, and live successfully. What kinds of jobs are you looking for, and is there anything we can do to help you find work?

Life Is Hard

What's up Beat, I'm writing today because I got some stuff to say. Well, I'd like to thank God cause if it wasn't for Him I would have been dead.

Why I say that is 'cause last year around this time I got shot when I was sitting in one of my potna's car in the San Francisco smokin' a blunt. Some "J-Cats" just started to bust, and I got hit two times -- once in the shoulder and once in the leg.

Life is hard, it's not the easy thang to do but dying is easy though, last year March 29, '06 I got a call on 4/1/07 that my baby girl was born and I was so happy I must of passed out a day later I went to go see her, but now can't, I'm locked up, I can't even see her I got locked up for something I didn't do, but all this time I'm in here I think about her and what I'm gone do when I get out, I'm not gone go back to the block. I'm gone let my BG's do that for me. Man I'm 18 and it's no more JJC (Juvenile Justice Center) for me, so yeah I don't want to go the big house that ain't cool at all. I'm gone.

-Hefner

From The Beat: You're right, the only big house you should be planning on is the big house you will one day share with your baby daughter and family, the one you earn with legit money while you're setting a positive example for your beloved baby girl. Just imagine how much she is going to look up to her daddy, and love him, and need him there by her side! As for letting your BG's go to the block for you, to tell you the truth we think that's hella exploiting them - you're putting them in the same danger you were in, and they look up to you. Now that you're coming on 18, you're responsible for the way the youngsters and if they bleed or serve time because they're looking up to you, then do you really want that blood and time and pain on your conscience?

It Was All A Dream

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window. So I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door, opened my door and walked down the hallway out to the front door to the parking lot, and into my mom's car - and home I went.

It was all a dream, but one day it will be true.

-Major

From The Beat: It will be true, but the nightmare you're in now could come back unless you change your ways. It's not just enough to wait for the days/how will you make sure that good dream stays?

TV

When I turn on the television I see BET. I see music videos people dancing, flashing money, jewelry, and dancing. I know how it feels to be in a video, but I still be excited when I watch it.

Another thing is the NBA, I love watching basketball especially when Kobe Bryant is playing, he's my favorite player. When I watch basketball I get excited and want to play... I'd rather watch basketball then videos cause basketball is real, so videos ain't. If was to watch anything on TV it'll be the news.

I choose the news because I want to know more things that's going on in the world. I know something don't be enough information for me, and also they be having something twisted also. The news I would choose to see more when I turn on the TV, more then almost anything to know what's going on in the world. They be having things twisted on news, for example whether they'll say it's hot in the next day it's raining or bout to rain. Sometimes they're right, but most time it's false information.

-Stevens

From The Beat: Sounds like you go TV for three things: Entertainment (videos), Inspiration (watching the games inspires you to play) and Knowledge about the world. This is kind of like life - too many people focus on entertainment, when it's inspiration and true knowledge that we're all the most hungry for deep down. And you're right, the news can be twisted - it's up to young people like you to step up and "untwist" it for us!

Construct Reality

Every time I turn on the TV I basically watch the news and stuff going in our community. They talk about it a lot, but it's not all that's going on ...they construct reality stuff they only thought happened. Like with killings and stuff they don't say the most important stuff that we want to know.

If I had my own TV show I would be about the real... I'd talk about how the killing really happened and all about killings, and schools with not enough money and more money spent with jails than any other things, and how they need more job programs for us so we won't do what we do.

Would people watch it? I hope so 'cause the community real messed up these days and people should listen.

-Lonnie

From The Beat: Right on Lonnie, you're looking for true knowledge... and it's true there's not much of that to be found on television. The knowledge you are talking about is the kind that will make you stronger, more powerful - not a victim but a leader.

Two Nines To Our Heads

Me and my potna was at the park and we fought these dudes. After we fought them we left, and when we was a corner away we saw a car pulled up real slow. Then we ran and when we got to the block we saw them and then we was like forget it, and then they hopped out the car and we stopped, and then the driver hopped out and pulled two nines out to our heads and pistol whipped my potna and he told his potna or whatever to fight him again, and then they fought. My potna won, then I saw hella my potnas come up and he pulled the gun at them.

But he didn't shoot, instead they was like all right, we'll be back, then started shootin' at the air.

-Joseph

From The Beat: Ugh - another example of how violence snowballs, and also of the way in which fights simply aren't settled with fists anymore. All the more reason to walk away, because no argument is worth getting shot over. You got lucky this time, but did you learn enough of a lesson to stay away from pistols and the pistol lifestyle, or did this make you more likely to think you need to carry one?

My Tree Will Look Like A Healthy Tree

In my past life if I continued to sell drugs and get high I would have an unhealthy tree 'cause it either was going to lead me to an early death or a long time in jail. But my tree is looking a lot healthier, 'cause I turned my life around by getting out the streets and going to church and listening to the word of God.

That's healthy for me and my tree but I keep it watered by doing the right thang and I'm going to church and become a son of the Lord.

-Darnell

From The Beat: The best thing about that tree is that as it grows it will also be your shelter, from rain and cold, from the hot sun. It will be wear fruit grows and birds sing... a tree worthy of the effort you're putting into it. Peace.

A Lonely Face

I sit here
A lonely face of white
In a sea of brown and tan
They preach integration
But I know I don't fit
In these walls
White ain't right
So I get by
Until I can get out

-M-R

From The Beat: Here are some statistics that might interest you. White people make up 57% of the population of Alameda County. Black people make up 14%, and Latinos make up 21% of the population. However, there are typically only one or two white kids in each unit at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center, while the vast majority of kids are Black or Latino. What are some of the social reasons for these inverse proportions based on race? Could it have to do with racism in our society or in law enforcement? What about access to education and health care services? We know it hurts to feel isolated in the Hall (and everyone does, regardless of color), but we hope this experience won't make you feel prejudiced against other groups.

Somehow

What's up wit' it Beat this Al Boo Boo telling y'all that someway and somehow God gone make this all better for me. I asked Him for forgiveness all the time, but this time -- I don't know to put it -- but I'm asking Him for real.

I got all my faith, all my strength in Him. And I know for a fact that he is gone make this happen for me one way or the other. And somehow I know in my head that the Judge is gone give me this last chance to be with my momma.

All I have to do is stick in there and say to myself "Alex you gon' be alright man." I miss the outs like hell but there was a reason for me to be in here in the first place.

But there is a reason for everyone right? Maybe because it's so many people getting killed out there on those streets.

God said it's not my time yet. But for real God did put us here for some good reason. We don't know what it is but He do. Love my questions and stay up black people on here and think good. Gone. One Love.

-Al Boo Boo

From The Beat: Almost all the major religions teach us that we can't just pray, we must also live each day according to an honorable path: We must be kind to others, honest in our actions, we must help those who are suffering more than we are, we must give thanks every day for the things we have. This is all a way to become closer to the holiness in yourself. Of everything you wrote in this piece, what we admired most is that at the end you gave a shout out to the other souls who are feeling as lost and worried as you are. (In our minds, that love extends to anyone hurting, be they black, white, or any other color, because we believe that souls have no race but human) ... that compassion is a sign of the best in your heart.

Glasses Can't Help You See Them Now

They lie in yo' face
But it's put out there so good you believe it
Then they turn they back and now they decievin'
They sugar coat it
And all that good stuff
But its believed so much you hesitate to call they bluff
Sometimes they even make it seem you
In the wrong when you can front them.
So now you thinking, "Am I trippin or somethin'?"
But on me other hand
Sometimes it can be ya closet friend
You get in some deep shhh!
Then when you blink they gone with the fish.
Now you locked up singin' R. Kelly "I Wish".
But that's not it
If you confront them they want to throw a fit
Now they deserve a Grammy award for such good actin'.
Now you feel like you deserve the slappin'
And those people are hypocrites
I'm thru wit' it.

-Domo

From The Beat: This is some of your wittiest writing yet, Domo, even though your using your skills to hate on your peers. We're not blaming you necessarily, but coming in from the outside the way we do, we wonder why human nature is the way it is: In the big picture, you all have so much in common, both on the outs and in jail, that if you all reached out to support each other instead of seeing the worst in each other, you could change the world and make it a better place to be in!

It's Nothing In Here For Me

The worst day I had was when I got my name in the system . That was my worst because I shouldn't have been doing what I was doin' and bein' with the people I was with at the same time. But now when I get out I am gonna change and be a better man than I can be. But this is the last time I am going to come back to any county, because it's nothing in here for me. I can't see my parents, and when I do get to see them I have to see them behind bars, and that's not cool.

The first thing I did? Well, I really didn't do it. I was just involved in it. So this is what happened, I was with my big cousin and his friends. We was riding' down the street in San Leandro, lookin' for somebody to rob. So we seen this old man and my cousin hopped out the car and they told me to hop in the driver's seat. So I did and when they came back they told me to drive off. So I did and I was in a high speed, and they pulled us over.

-DeShawn

From The Beat: We chose the title we did because we agree with you so much. You don't belong in here - no one does. But if you want to stay out, you'll have to change who you hang out with, and even how much time you spend with your cousin. Are you ready to make some changes in who you spend your time with, at least until you've gotten your habits and life back on the right path?

Them Days

Them days go dumb
Them days get money
Them days is lovely
Them days come hold us
Them days I go shopping
Them days I'm poppin'
Them days I don't regret
Them days I will never forget

-Sartha

From The Beat: Awesome. You've lived them days and paid your price, and now it's time to ask how you will live the future. What about a "Them Days" part two - called "Next Days"?

Lil Mousie and TB

M: Up in this game its about survival. You got to play the game, don't let it play you! You gots to maintain solid!
TB: The game's always squalid. Sinks fast as cement boots if you're determined to stay solid with the gang you bang. It's time for a young man to develop to higher plan. Step up by yourself and take a stand.

M: Man I been solid. I been had my plan, but it's the hood the homies I refuse to abandon! I know people is trying to get the good out of me. But I'm not college bound all I know is what I know from the streets!

-Lil' Mousie and TB

From The Beat: Mousie, the definition of being human is our ability to grow and keep learning. Fine, the streets is all you know NOW. But why not take 5 years to get your self through school and discover a whole other way of living. If after college you decide you want to go back to the streets (you won't, trust us), then you can. But right now, why not try something new? Do you want to stop growing when you've not even lived a quarter of your life yet?

The System is All Wrong

The system is all wrong.

They don't work wit' us.

Everyone is tryin' to kill us or lock us up,
but don't understand us or what we go through.

They don't want to even take a chance to talk
because it's all over money.

That's the main thing.

They don't give us jobs or nothing to help.

-Lil' Rob

From The Beat: Your short piece raises a lot of really important issues about the lack of rehabilitation or education in the criminal "justice" system, and the lack of empathy that can be found among some who are employed by that system. For instance, the Correctional Officers union has lobbied successfully for tougher and tougher parole laws. Is this job security for them? Yes. But let's talk about you for a minute. What is your plan for your own security and well-being? How will you avoid becoming another statistic?

I Can't Say More

Well me I'm going through hella shhh, my little brother is in here and we both in the system. I can't say more -- I don't want to cry.

-Myesha

From The Beat: These two sentences pierce the heart, which is why we printed them even though they were so short. Just know that you are not alone in this sad feeling: A lot of the people whose pieces are right next to you in The Beat have felt that same pain and loneliness you are describing right now.

Happiest Day, Worst Day

The happiest day of my life in 2007 was 6/15/07, my mom's birthday. It was so fun. I mainly had fun because she had fun. I love seein' my mom happy, especially after all she's been through. Five kids, father in and out of jail and my mom struggling to make a dollar out of fifteen cents.

Now that my mom got someone to love her and help her a lot she is more happier than she's ever been in her adult years.

The worst day in my life in 2007 is when I ran from camp. I hurt my mother so bad she cried her heart out. So y'all think about when y'all come to jail, y'all hurtin' y'all family more than you hurt yourself.

-Lil' D

From The Beat: Your love for your mom, and her love for you, shows in your writing and makes this piece shine. And remember, it's because of her love for you that she hurts, because what hurts your mom the most is seeing you hurt yourself.

TV

Click, and a show come on action, comedy, news or porn. I hate it when commercials come on. That's why I like watching movies, 'cause TV be hella boring.

All the shows is a waste of time when you can be outside making dough. Then when you make enough you can watch as much TV you want. Making money is easy, you got to have a hustle like me... pouring cement, then after that stealing bottles and then sell them to my potnas. Then you gotta find other ways to make some 'fetti.

-Money Over Television

From The Beat: There are easier and better ways of making money - like getting a job with the city that you can add to your resume so that later on you can get an even better job. Have you thought of doing that? A lot of colleges will also let you work part time to help pay tuition. What about that?

Bruises In My Heart

Money and love is my passion, everything I do, I do it in a nice fashion,

I always wear no gloves or maskin'

I live my life in a fast lane so it's no need to fasten... my seatbelt.

When you look at me, what do you see?

What do you think of me? How am I to you?

Am I koo, smooth, solid or what?

When you look into my eyes, you see a thug and a cutie.

When you look at my smile, you see love and happiness.

When you lift up my shirt, you don't see any cuts or wounds,

...but if you can feel my pain and love, you can feel and see bruises in my heart.

-J-Money

From The Beat: We don't see a thug when we look at you, or a "cutie." We see a caring and hurting young man who has a great deal to face in the future, who is doing his best to come to grips with jail time and prepare himself for it, who continues to connect with his humanity and true feelings, on paper and in real life, who has the strength to make it through these coming challenges, and who has a warm heart that we think is big enough to keep his courage up in the coming months and beyond. That's what we see. What do you see in yourself?

All Alone

In this world I feel all alone

And my only protector is my chrome.

I'm just another youngster tryna survive

In the land where the grimeiest roam

Prayin' that my name

Doesn't get carved on a tombstone.

-D'Tay

From The Beat: This is a heartbreaking little poem, and it's full of heart and skill too. But we worry because we think that there's a better and safer way to live. On the other hand, we don't know enough about your life to know what you're up against.

Stressed Over Grandma

I'm really stressed out right now because my grandma is dying this week, so I'm hella mad. All this time I be crying in my room ask God for forgiveness like this. I hope that my grandma know that I love her with all my heart -- until I die you know.

-Siosaia

From The Beat: By the time this piece is printed, so much will have happened that what we write right now could be outdated. Perhaps she'll be better, perhaps the worst will have happened. But our hearts reach out to you, and all we can say is that we're thinking of you and wishing you all the strength and hope we have in you. And yes, no matter what, your grandma knows how much you love her.

This Morning

I woke up and said damn! I'm tired of being in here, I need to go home because this ain't the place for me. I belong at home, but then I thought about what I did and relaxed 'cause when you do the crime you got to do the crime. Ooh, well!!!

The worst day of my life was when I came back here for the eighth time. It was 'cause I was on ecstasy. I was on two pills and I was with my potnas driving around. Next thing you know I'm running from a helicopter and a bunch of flashing lights running down a creek. What happened was I tried to rob someone and we tried to get away and ran to a dead end turned around both cars head on collision. Next day task gets me at the park - and look where I'm at.

All because of ecstasy.

-Repo

From The Beat: Tired of coming to jail is good. So what will you do to not return once you serve your sentence? As for your partying and drug usage, all we can say is we hope you will take a good long look at yourself as a sober young man, and we hope you are willing to get some intervention to help you not get swallowed up in using and abusing your body and your freedom!

The Happiest Day Of My Life

What's up wit' it Beat? This Lil' D coming back, but yeah the happiest day in my life was when my niece Sahmon was born. She was 7lbs. and 3oz. I was at the hospital. It was like a miracle. She's my only niece. I'm so close to her, I love her like my own and six years later she lets her uncle know she loves him too. So 12/26/01 is my happiest day of my life. Peace out.

-Derrick

From The Beat: How does your niece feel now that your in juvenile hall? Do you think it makes her happy to not be able to see her uncle whenever she wants? Take care of your responsibilities and take care of your niece.

My Good Bye

Once upon a time I thought that you loved me
But the truth has come out, now your starting to bug me
Not so much the truth, but the simple fact
That everything you said, was part of your stupid act
So don't be surprised when the day comes
When I'm callin' the next guy my "number one"
Cause you got the other girls, callin' you they man
And it's nothing I can do to make you under stand,
That when I said "I love you", I can't believe I meant it!
To bad everything you "felt", turned out to be
bullshhh....

So don't start actin' stupid. Sayin' "oh, baby I love you!"
Where that come from? Did tha other women dump you!
I was stupid enough to believe that everything you spoke
was real

Little did I know it was only my heart you wanted to
steal
But now I'm speaking, don't continue, be a man and quit
it!

Go ahead and turn your head on the only girl who ever
gave a real f-- about you
It's okay if you don't realize that from day one
I always remained true....
But you was to blind to see....
So this is my good bye, for all eternity
~The End~

-Goldy Locks

From The Beat: If Aretha Franklin could hear this poem, she'd put it to music, to sing along with "Respect" and "Ain't No Way." This is a true woman's blues if we've ever heard one.

Money

Root of all evil
Loved by all
Live wit it
Live wit out it
Money rules the world

-Moe

From The Beat: Money can't control the weather, or how much true love you get in life, or your health, or your soul. In other words, yeah you need money to live, but to make love worth living, you need heart.

I'm Gonna Do Mine Too

The Judge don't know, she just be doing her job,
While I be tryin' to do mines, man I'm just tryin' to mob,
I do what I do, but it ain't always that bad,
They just misunderstood me but I think they be mad,
That I'm out here pushin' I'm just tryin' to shine,
The system knocking my hustle man I'm tryin' to get
mines,
I know I mess up but I can always get right,
Even if I'm getting gwap all day and all night,
I'm not tryin' to be negative but my life messed up,
I gotta get it together but I won't fess us,
Never snitch, never tell I could never do that,
Police ask for my peoples all I say is "who that?"
But I know the tables turn man I'm gonna get mines,
I'm already getting pieces sitting here doing time,
This right here ain't my life this jail shhh is old,
I don't care what you've heard or what you been told,
There's a better life for me further through the road,
I'm gonna do mines, I got my game all sewed.

-Lil' Gumby

From The Beat: Your rhymes' on time but if you think you can buy time, and "get yours" in a life of crime, and keep your boots clean stomping through that grime, then yo' days won't be worth a dime. Mind right game tight proud heart held up in daylight, you got to bring your dreams to the good fight, don't let your flows end up a jail kite.

People Deserve A Chance

I think that if you are in a gang you get treated different than the "A" track kids or the "smart ones." Because they kind of put themselves in a situation to be treated different. But it still doesn't matter they deserve it. If they want it, if they really wanna succeed, you can't judge someone before you get them a chance.... and even than only God can judge.

So I think that we should be given a chance to learn be a successful human being.

-Alexandria

From The Beat: It's true, sometimes those trackings they do in school can really mess a person up, like getting a label about who you are when you're still trying to DISCOVER who you are. So if you get that second chance, what will you do with it?

As Much As I Did....

I woke up this morning feeling like Baby James, thinking about hella shhh that happened in my past, and how much more shhh that is going to happen in my future when I get out.

I was hella mad Saturday morning on July 7th. It was my Birthday, I was trippin' but I wasn't trippin' like that, 'cause I'm thankful to be living to see that sixteenth birthday. As much shhh I done did, a ninja was supposed to been gone. But yeah I gets "real active".

-Baby James

From The Beat: After all you've been through, isn't it time you find a new way to do things? Get a program, a mentor, a job? You've been lucky so far, but do you want to live your life by luck, or by choice?

Today

I woke up in the morning and saw the sun in my window. First thing I did, took a shower, got dressed, got in my car, and drove to my friend's house to play video games for money.

Why (money), because he always lose to me and he be getting mad. I told him, "you want to keep playing me?" He said, "yes I will keep playing 'till I beat you."

Why he said that was because we bet 50 dollars a game, sometimes 80 or 100. You know that a lot from betting, and the game we was playing was NBA Live 2007. That's the only game I played in my life. But yeah that's every morning during 9:30 to 12:00 or 11:30.

After that I just go to chill at my place where I used to live. Sometimes it gets crazy, sometimes it don't, but its nice over there, that's why white people take over now. That's cool. Before I moved in it, there used to be bad, I heard. So now they always calling the police saying that we selling drugs and shhh. We tell them (neighbors and police) we don't do that shhh.

But yeah I be waking up every morning, play that video game, and that's good you know why? Because I always win playing NBA Live so I tell you need to stop betting me before you lose all your money. He was like, "so what man, lets' play!"

I was like, "all right, lets go," but I lost that day. He was cool, I always win. He won 200 dollars

-Phanara

From The Beat: Sounds like your days were filled with excitement. How did you get so good at playing one video game, even though you lost that one day? Did you ever think about trying to make some real big money out of it? Like going to competitions and such? What are your mornings like now that your in here? Will you put the video games on hold and get back into school? As for gambling, why so much money?

This Morning When I Woke Up

I had a dream one night when I was with my homies and we went to the mall.

Some fine girl kept looking at me so I went to go talk to her, I asked her why she was looking at me and she said because you have nice eyes. So I asked her her name and asked her for her number. She gave me her number on a piece of paper because I knew I was locked up and the people had took my phone.

I also told her I had a grill but the people at Alameda County had my tops and bottoms.

I told her that I was supposed to be in jail, but I don't know how I was there in the mall. Then I woke up mad because I was in my cell.

-Solo

From The Beat: It must be frustrating to have such strange dreams of being on the outs and wake up in your cell! Do you sometimes like having dreams? Does it give you some sort of escape from the reality that your currently in?

Worst Day Of My Life

The worst day of my life was when I got arrested on last Friday at 10 at night and when I first stepped foot in the police car because I left my mom, my dad and two sisters. Basically my whole family. And watching my mom crying and seeing my dad cry for the first time in my life.

When I get home I will spend more time with my family and right when they tell me to do something or ask me, I will do it in a heart beat.

-Anthony

From The Beat: It's good to hear you say that you are willing to spend more time with your family upon your release. Why do you think you didn't before your arrest? Its good to hear young people talk about changing their lives. Hopefully you will put your words into action.

Gangs = People Telling You What To Do

The reason why I'm not in a gang because people end up in jail or they are 6 feet under and that's not where I want to be. When people are in gangs they got to listen to other people and those people tell them to go do something bad, and then they end up 6 feet under. I

I knew one person and he was in a gang. He told me that he was going to do something, and I talked to him before he went to go do it. Early that next morning his mom called me and told me he was gone.

So that's why I don't want to be in a gang. For all you people who read this don't join a gang because you're going to end up 6 feet under or in jail.

-Lil' Saint B

From the Beat: Thanks for setting this down. You learned the truth a painful way, and now we hope maybe someone reading about what happened to your boy will rethink his or her own life and get out. Just imagine -what you write could save someone from getting taken down.

Bad/Good/Court Date

This morning I woke up and had to listen to staff sing. Then I had court. I was in court holding tank then my lawyer came in and started to talk to me. He told me that they made a deal. I asked what it was and he said that they drop five charges and left me with two charges of robbery and pursuit of the Oakland Police Department. At first I had seven counts, and they were all felonies.

Now that I accepted the deal all I have is one felony and a misdemeanor. The judge told me when I went to court that my max time is 3 years and 8 months.

Then they told me to come back in 2 weeks, on July 24th.

Then my lawyer told me that they were probably going to release me on probation.

I've been here since June 17th, and now its July 10th.

-Porkey

From The Beat: Do you think that was the best deal you could of got? The best deal would have been to never put yourself in the situation your in. The judge is still liable to give you your maximum time, and that will put your whole life at a different point then it was before. Be smart if you touch down in the free world. Don't take your freedom for granted.

A Cell Awakening

I woke up this morning with the sun light bouncing of the court yard walls and into the window of my cell into my eyes. I then would get up out of bed to one of the counselors on the intercom getting the rest of my peers up and ready for the day.

Then me not realizing I'm still in jail, I wake up surprised. I often find myself asking how did I get in here.

Then comes the voices. Since the time I walked in my cell I've been hearing things. First they were fuzzy, now they are clear. This is not what I've planned for you in life. Says a voice in my head, most of the time that's what I hear. I know God is there, so I do not fear, but there's also a devil in my ear telling me my deepest fear, you're nothing, you a bad person, your going to hell, that's why you're here.

-Jamil

From The Beat: Man, it must be something else to be hearing voices. How long have you been in there? Did you ever hear things before you became incarcerated? If anything, some say the best counselor is the room you are locked up in, and in the end you have a choice to make, right? If it is more than that, seek someone you trust to talk to.

Damn Them Days

I remember them days as a little kid playing jail break with the homeboys, hopping on school roofs to free my homeboys who got caught. And as I got older we started hanging in groups, we took care of each other not letting no one mess with us. But as I got much older my group of homeboys turned into a crowd.

Now I gangbang always running the streets, fighting, starting riots, and always living life on the edge. Now when I dream back on those days when I played jail break with the homeboys, I never thought I'll be waking up in jail still playing jail break, but this time I'm waiting to be freed. Damn them days.

-Nuckles

From the Beat: As we mature both in age and in our mind state, we see the changes we been through. As a child you used to play jail break, now your in a situation where you wish you could get a jail break. Do you think that playing that game might of either added fuel or calmed your urge to become a criminal?

RIP JoJo

Driving down school street on a Honda with my patna
Porkey

I made a quick stop and saw my homeboy

I saw him get into it with an enemy

It all happened so fast

Jojo was my homeboys name

To tell you the truth he had a lot of fame

He was a thug that didn't care how he got his money

And didn't care about crossing the boundary

He always carried a shottie, I never knew why

Until the day he didn't and sadly he died

It all happened like this;

He decided to go bowling with his girl and have some
fun

Neither did he know that it was going to end soon with
a gun

One shot wasn't enough, it took them five

Instantly taking away his life

In Hayward's famous Holiday Bowl on a cold summer
night

We will never forget you JoJo

-Loony

From The Beat: If you are thinking revenge, all it does is make a cycle of violence. If you get revenge for you friend's death, then someone will try to revenge that friend's death, and so on and so on. It will never stop, more tears and more pain for many people who do not deserve this. Gang violence leads to all of this, it needs to stop somewhere, why not let it be you?

My Door Stays Locked

This morning when I woke up and tried to open my door it was locked.

I got mad because I realized I was still in juvenile hall for somebody lying on me. So I thought about how I'm getting released on Tuesday and that got me happy again. But then every day I think about home, I feel like getting even madder because I'm not comfortable with being told what to do by people I don't know.

I can't even eat when I want to, so that's what it feel like when I go to the door.

When I get out I'm going to go eat all day and night.

-Darren

From The Beat: It must be hard to know that you can't open your own door whenever you wish. If you don't like the conditions your in, then why don't you get out and never come back? Do something where you could do whatever you want to, and tell your friends and the next generation that incarceration is not cool.

My Thoughts Will You Listen Or Treat Me Like A Sinister?

There are millions of pros and cons about being in a gang. Being in a gang can bring you protection, brotherhood, and loyalty.

Don't get me wrong, all gangs aren't bad; most of them are but not all of them.

Some gangs are about the "turf wars". They get together, post up on the block and if they see someone who ain't from the hood that they walking through, you can pretty much guess the rest.

Gangs make people feel protected. When you in a gang you feel like you all good, ain't nobody gone mess with you, right? Wrong! Say for instance you had to shoot somebody to be in, but they don't die. You don't know they ain't dead but you ain't trippin', you in a gang now, they gonna protect you, but they can't sleep with you. So now you walking home by yourself and the dude you shot roll up on you with his gang and start bustin' at you. Then what?

-Ernesto

From The Beat: Gangs are such a controversial subject. Many people have different opinions and the argument could go on forever. Gangs are in the most part, more bad than good. They bring a lot of pain and hurt to many people, not just the rival gang members but also brothers, sister's parents and other family members. All gangs do to people is double their problems. Leave the guns and the gangs!

RIP Mom

What's up Beat? I know I ain't wrote in nine months but I'm back with a story...

She was the only thing I had, she was my ace boone koone. She was my backbone. She was a devoted and honorable woman. She was good to me and anyone around her. She was special. She was my mom. RIP Mom. She died 12/11/06.

-Derrick

From The Beat: Losing a parent is one of the worst possible feelings one could feel. The person who brought you into this world can no longer be present to guide you in the right direction. But its good that you remember her for all the good things and you keep her memory alive. As long as you got her in her heart, she will never leave your side.

The Hall Aint The Place To Be

The worst day of my life was the day that I got to the hall. It was not any fun being arrested and brought here. It's not what I want for my life and I'm going to try and straighten up my life by doing good in school and stop getting in trouble and get on better terms with my family, especially my mom.

It ain't fun knowing your mom is not going to come and visit you on visiting days.

It's hard being locked up knowing you can be doing better things with your life then getting bossed around by some people you just met and sitting in your cell half the day staring at four walls. Thinking why I did what I did, it isn't worth it. It's not any fun when you could be out with your homies or with your girl living life the way you want and staying out of the hall and obeying the laws. The hall has taught me something it's no fun in here. its better on the outs where you are free.

-Beanz

From The Beat: It's always a sigh of relief when we see a young individual realizing that the hall isn't the place to be. We see so many youngsters going in and out, and consistently violating and finding themselves in the confinement of the hall. How can you make sure your mind stays on the right track once you are released? Do you have a plan in writing? What led to your incarceration? Not just the actual crime, but all the changes you've seen that led you to do what you did? Stay positive and you will be on the outs with your family once again.

Bad Days

The worst day of my life was when I was locked up and head that two of my homeboys got killed. Another worst day of my life was when I was at my hood and a car full of rivals came by and started shooting at us. That day my homeboy got shot in the leg. Those are my worst days of my life.

-It's bad

From The Beat: Shootings and deaths are always a bad day for anyone. It's a tragedy that you have witnessed both and maybe more. Could you have stopped any one of those from happening?

Home

The place that supports me and taught me self-control,
Respect is what I failed to feed my home,
I learned thanks to my home for giving an open mind,
When I was blind my home guided me everywhere I went,
But still I failed by being locked up here in jail.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: As long as you realize you made a mistake, and you see the positive places you should be, you will turn out alright. Just make sure once you're free to stay home!

Dear Mama

I thank you for giving me that strong love
You're my falcon that float the skies and beautiful dove
This isn't the life you raise me to live
To rob, lie, beat, kill, harm, and to steal
But I purchase a stone of the wrong steps to walk
Struggle to stand but ashamed to even talk
And I'm sorry for my dramatic explorer of badness
Finally it brought you down to sadness
I promise to show you one day that I'm a good dad
And you'll always be that queen of all times
And gon' be happy of me somewhere down the line
No more tears of sadness that you gone cry my dear
'Cause when you cry I shed a shadow of tears
Now I'm doing time against my own spirit
My mind is clear in my heart I can hear and feel it
Tears participating to explore my face
I struggle to speak and no woman could take your place
You're my sun, moon of my life that shine up on my heart

Remember no matter where I go we're never apart

-Lil' Papa F

From The Beat: Beautiful tribute to your mother. This painful experience may be the door you have to take in order to save your life and for you to realize there is so much more to living than harming yourself or others on the streets. Take care of you Papa, and be there for your family, your child!

Come Back

Please come back to me so you can rest in my arms
Miss your loving kisses that keeps me feeling warm
Soon you'll realize that we were meant to be
With love, trust, happiness just you and me
Forever I'm your kindness man
And want to cherish you until my very end
I place you under my heart deep inside
If you're lonely or crying I'll come running to your side

However, candy and cards that I can't hide
'Cause you're a goddess with a strong living pride
Will you come back?

Or your love for me lost a fact?
Memories bringing out emotions of cries
And the moment I had to say good-bye
No matter what time is on my side for you
Please come back, I miss you baby true!!

Scared to lose you forever and want you baby
To treat you right like a queen or lady
Give me a chance to spread my feelings
And in a space in your heart will you forgive me?

-Lil' Papa F

From The Beat: It is painful to get left by a loved one, and when you're in the situation you're in, it must be harder. The lady you write about must be a lucky one, and she must realize how much of a man you really are. Hopefully one day she will come back in your arms.

Nowadays

I feel like thizz ain't the problem but it's a different drug that youngstas are doing,
it's called powder and it's just taking over their brains.
It's the summer and they get off of the drug and they don't know what to do that's why people are dieing fast.
Another reason why people are dieing is because nowadays kids don't fight no more.
A kid is ready to go get a gun and shoot one another.

-Lil' Paul

From The Beat: All drugs are bad and affect people's habits and reactions to all things. Weather it be "thizz", "powder", or anything else, it's all bad. But you do make a point on kids don't fight no more. Why do you think youngstas go straight for a pistol?

Pills Aint It

The murder rate in Oakland is goin' up but pills is not what the problem is. Just like the summer, winter, spring, and fall are all seasons the season that the government don't know about is "Funkin Seasons".

Young people now days are seeing how easy it is to take a life so they feel like they got power.

Back in the day if you got into it with somebody it would end in a fight and that's all. But now if you get yo' ass whooped you got to come back with a gun and shoot them to protect your reputation.

-Lil' Chris

From The Beat: There might be a lot of factors in the reason Oakland's murder rate is rising, drugs included. Why does a reputation mean so much to people? Does it really mean more than another human beings life? It's only "Funkin Season" if you make it.

Thoughts

It's never too late to change it's just that life is too short.

Time are going by, more are beginning to die.
Wannabees out there posted on the yard.

Holding guns acting hard
anyone can pull the trigger
but when it comes up to not snitching who's the real ninja.

So call homies talking about that they will always be there,

but when you doing time they don't care.
Life is like a lottery you'll never know what come next,
everybody is ready to have sex.

Want to get laid but doesn't know their partner have AIDS.

Said she doesn't but you were being played.
Nobody cares how much you know only until you know how much they care.

-Saran

From The Beat: There are many risk out there in the world, unprotected sex being one. And the fact that anybody can get a gun and pull the trigger is scary.

The Beef

Dis ain't nothing like a walk in the park.
It's like you lost in the world alone in the cold, lost in
tha dark.
Around ma neighborhood kids be shootin' and killin'
each other,
But around yo' neighborhood people be woundin' from
bullets,
People be gettin' shot as birds begin to flop.
Pop! Pop! There goes another kid getting shot!
Mothers goin' insane
Someone blew out her son's brains,
But in the end you might be a success... if not your
gonna be six feet under.
So stop while you can!

-Jabba

From The Beat: Stop while you can... excellent advice. Are you taking it?

Real Challenge Still To Come

Dam! Still in here wasting my time. But it's not all bad.
Maybe I'm in here till summer for a reason, 'cause maybe
if I was out now, I probably would've done something even
more stupider than what I already done to get myself in
this mess. I really want to change. Well, I tell myself I do.
The real challenge comes when I get release.

-Angel

From The Beat: By acknowledging that it's easier to say you want to change than actually to do it, you're telling us that you're no longer thinking like a child. That means you have the knowledge to change, now all you need is self-discipline and a goal that you keep focused right in front of you. You can do it.

This Morning

When I woke up this morning I was thinking about
gettin' out of YGC because I miss my family and friends. I
think of people that I love so much. I think YGC is a place
that people need to stay away. You do not like to wake up
in YGC at all. I like to wake up at home, not at YGC. When
I wake at home I will be so happy because I see my mom,
dad, brother and sister. It will be so cool. To The Beat
Within, I will like to wake up at home not in YGC because
I need to see people. I will get out in two weeks and I will
wake up at home.

-Young Wee

From The Beat: We're really glad that you're going to be able to sleep and wake in your own bed. Time will tell whether you're able to keep doing it...

What's Valued?

Even during the time I'm locked up, I have a treasure
valued so much that I would not be able to get by this
time without it. We usually do it during night time, but
occasionally during the day. What's my treasure you ask?
IT'S LISTENING TO MUSIC!

Unfortunately, we only get to listen to music whenever
staff feels like it. I would rather sit in my cell all day
listening to music than to be out during rec time. That's
how much it's valued. Even though all I hear is rap, R&B,
and oldies, my favorite type of music is Trance by different
DJs.

-Baby C

From The Beat: We think if they allowed you to have your own music and not have to depend on staff, there would less time to get into mischief and more time to let music do its healing. In a poem written more than 300 years ago ("The morning bride") the poet William Congreve wrote: "Music has charms to soothe the savage breast."

This Morning

I woke up this morning in a cold breeze waiting to get
my hygiene bag and pants. I lay on my bed reading my
book waiting to get out, hoping I will live another day in
here with no time. Getting visits every other day, eating
the same old food, after rec to the room, going to bed for
another night and awaiting another day in the halls.

-DeNeal

From The Beat: What book are you reading? Are you doing anything to prepare yourself for freedom — so that you can keep it?

Good Days And Bad Days

Them day of my life was the worst when I was groin' up.
From age 10 to 15 was them bad days because I had to
get everything by myself. That way my life was hard. Mom
was in jail for nine years, and I had to go get like every
ninja out there in the streets. My good days was when my
mom got out and we move in. We started all over and it
been good ever since.

-Terrance T

From The Beat: It's good that your mom is out of jail and that the two of you are able to be together. But why did you allow yourself to be taken away from her, and what are you going to change so that it doesn't happen again?

Them Days

I remember them days when shhh was sweet, post up
at the platinum
Shhh hit the fan and got smacked wit' the duce duce
magnum
Grandma running out the house asking "B" what
happened
'Cause the impact of the blade left my seatbelt
unfastened
I remember the days when everything was a game
But when I dream about the future everything ain't the
same
I'm tryna step it up but then times get hard

'Cause head still shaken by the hit of the car.

-C Dre

From The Beat: We'd like to read your description of this car crash and how it happened. But what we're really interested in is what you see when you "dream about the future." Will you be in it? Will you be free? What's your plan for making your dreams come true?

Waiting To Go Home

What it do, Beat? It's me, Grumpy...

Damn! I'm hella mad I didn't go home on my last
court day the 6th. I was supposed to go home, but my
PO recommended a group home because he doesn't want
me near my big bro. That's hella messed up, but its coo'
'cause I know that on my next court day I'ma get out for
sure because I called my bro and I told him what's up.

Now I'm gonna have to wait another month, but it's
coo'. Hopefully, they let me go. I guess I'ma have to do my
time and keep my head up 'cause when I get out I'ma be
with my fam and my homies. I'ma be at the house chillin'
with my Pooh Bear eating hella tacos and other shhh, you
feel me...

Well, that's about it. I'm out, Beat. Alrato! Much love
for whoever doing time. Keep y'all heads up...

-Grumpy

From The Beat: We could still use a few more details. For example, why doesn't your PO want you to hang with your brother? How do you know you'll get out on your next court date? Assuming you are right and you go home, what changes do you plan to make there so that you don't have to come back here?

Them Days

Them days on da block was fun. I was just out on the run for a few months with ma squad rocking. A lot went down. It's real sponkey. You got to get it how you live. If you not a real ninja you will get put on a tee or ran of the block.

-Chuck

From The Beat: When we can print what you write, we still have to take whole sentences out. Since your definition of "a real ninja" leads to the grave or to the pseudo slavery you keep allowing yourself to be put in, we guess that those rich white men at the top of the pyramid just smile whenever you write this nonsense, and when you go out there to do their dirty work for them (which is what you're doing when you help destroy other young black men and their neighborhoods).

The Good Old Days Are Long Gone

I remember them days, them good days to be exact when everything was all good, when I didn't have to worry about a thing. I'm talking about when my mother took care of me, when she fed me an' put clothes on my back. But them days is long gone. But check it — I'm barely a teen and forced to be a man. Right now I'm separated from the fam, but I ain't complainin' 'cause I'ma man, feel me.

-Gutta

From The Beat: No, we don't exactly feel you. First, your own body and brain are still developing into manhood, and there is NO DOUBT that you will see things and think things differently when you have finally completed the process of growing up. It's a shame that you are forced into making adult decisions even before you reach adulthood, but don't confuse that with being a man. That's still to come, and when it does, you will look back on this time of your life and shake your head in disbelief.

This Morning

This morning I went to court and they gave me more time. The sun was beaming on me and I went home and stayed outside. The sun was hot and I went and talked to my aunt and my mom, and they say, "It's vary hot today, let's have fun on this hot day. And I seen my young son and he got wet with water. And my door opened and I had ice in my hand and it melted. And it was a hot day. It was 110°.

-Baby Casper

From The Beat: We like the description of the hot day and the ice melting in your hand, BC, but we don't understand how you got to go home when you write that when you went to court you got more time... Can you explain?

This Morning

This morning the sun was beaming through my square shaped window. The only difference was the counselor said breakfast in five minutes. That's when I got up and washed my face. Then I brushed my teeth and washed my face again for good measure.

Then I took off my gym shorts so I wouldn't get four hours of room time. After that I put my pants on, lotion, and I was ready for breakfast. That's when I went to my door and waited for the counselor to buzz me out to go the cafeteria area and get my breakfast. And that's usually how my morning starts, except for the sun because it doesn't always shine through my square window.

But me, I stay shining in this place and out this place. I make the sun hide out.

-Baby T

From The Beat: We're sure you don't want to start your mornings with someone telling you to wake up and be ready in five minutes. We know you'd rather be in your own bed, waking up to some way better breakfast than some juvenile food. Get out and stay out so you can enjoy your freedom and shine on the "outs," 'cause you ain't really shining in them county shorts.

Gonna Get Slicker

I woke dis morning and I thought I was free, but I thought wrong. An' dat's a real messed up feeling. The dream I had that I was out doin' my thang gettin' money da only way I know how, and that gettin' on da grind. But all dat's on hold 'cause I'm in here. But when that day come, I'm go be real slick about my shhh 'cause I ain't coming back here.

-Poon. G

From The Beat: Unfortunately, you won't believe us when we tell you that as long as your goal is to be slick about what you do ("gettin' on da grind"), you will certainly be back here (or worse). We hope you realize this before the hole you're digging for yourself gets too deep to crawl out of.

This Morning

I woke up this morning and felt like crying because I realized that I messed up my life for the next year to year and a half. I sit in there and think about all the crimes I committed and all the girl and families and victims. I think about the money, days I missed in school.

-Skindonesia

From The Beat: Sometimes, crying is the most appropriate reaction to what's happening in our lives. You are carrying around a lot of guilt for the things you've done, so we hope that the tears you're feeling and the regrets for missing out on your own education lead to a firm decision to change the things you feel like crying about so that you can begin to make amends and build a future life of success and freedom.

C-Dubb

It was not fair when my peace officer chose to let a white boy out and he shot another person in the head with a bb gun. He was released in three days because of his skin color and I'm in here for months for something I wasn't involved with and that wasn't fair. Just a piece of my mind

-C-Dubb

From The Beat: We don't know what really happened with the "white boy" you wrote about (because we're pretty sure you don't know what happened in that case, either). But if you weren't involved in the crime that led you here, then that's what you should be focusing on so you can get out from under this injustice.

Sorry

Baby D, don't take this the wrong way
I understand you like me
But I only see you as a homie
I wanna handle mines
And not be with somebody
I never knew you would ask me out
I didn't know you was gonna take it that far
You're my friend
And that's what I wanna be
You coo', and have a great
Personality but I just can't
Put you a part of me
Sorry, but you still my homie
Don't take it the wrong way
So stay strong
Keep your mind the right way
I've been trying to let you know
But I never had the time
And the words to say to you:
Sorry

-BabyMama

From The Beat: Well, we think you've done a good job of letting Baby D down gently, even though we're sure he'd rather not be let down at all. But from our experience, friendships last a lot longer than love affairs, especially at your age, so even if he's disappointed for a minute, in the long run he'll appreciate it.

Master Peace

When I wake up in jail,
I think about bail
And when I start doin' they get man out my sell
And then I told 'em don't tell
It's either kill or be killed
When me an my hittas grew up
We was always told not to squeal
But now I'm all below in a room made of steal
Can't walk, can't tell my fans and fam how you feel
I'm in a life that is... real

-Za Zoo

From The Beat: Well, even if this isn't a masterpiece, it still teaches something important. Now that you're experiencing the reality of lock-up, does it make you want to change anything about that other reality you've been living?

The Outs

Man, I'm bout ready to do anything to get out (except snitch). I'm done being up in this piece of shhh. I need to get out. I know I said I ain't neva coming back, but thus time I'm for real. I'm tired of this. This shhh is getting old, for real for real. Ya dig, I need to get out and help my lil bra out 'cause these streets is getting hectic, feel me.

-Quez

From The Beat: We believe you, Quez, but we also think you were telling the truth before when you said you weren't coming back. The problem is, it's much easier to make that promise when other people are making all your choices for you. Once you're free to make your own decisions, then almost immediately you are presented with choices that force you to say "No" to people you love, and that takes a rare kind of courage. We hope you have it.

Them Days

I remember the day on July 15 of this year. It was my little cousin B-B-Q because she graduated. You know what I was doing, smokin' and shhh, but I was messed up. I had real fun. It was at my aunty house. It was like a family reunion.

But the worst day was on July, 16 on this year. I got locked up. I hated myself, but now I'm focusing on getting out.

-Tolufale

From The Beat: Yes, focus o getting out — and staying out. You should be at a BBQ right now. Don't hate yourself, just accept the fact that you made a mistake, and correct it. Learn from your experience and try not to make the same mistakes again.

Ain't Coming Back

I wanna get the hell out of here so bad. So boring in here and don't know what to do. Missing my loved ones. Been there for them always. When I'm in here, only you family visit you. No matter what you do, your parents still love you. I know it wasn't easy raising me, a lil' Chinese bomb ready to explode. A single mother raising two kids. Ain't coming back in here.

-Chinatown

From The Beat: Isn't it strange that after all the bad things we do to our parents, after all the bad things we've said, after all the bad thoughts we've had — they still love us! Now that you're mature enough to realize just how many sacrifices your mother made for you as a single parent, you're also old enough to realize what you have to do (and what you have to stop doing) to begin to pay her back. If you do those things, she will smile in her heart and know that it was all worth it.

Them Days

I remember on the block, very sunny days everybody chilling people out roaming around, big barbecue parties, big homies all out and lil' homies just living life good, hella females around, big money flashing. Dice games, and ya know it's all good in da 'hood.

But anyway, me and a few homies was put in a situation of having some dough, which put me in the game of what they call balling. I mean I had money for days, big restaurants with family, hella clothes an' shoes, fat platinum chain, ya know, just doing my thang to the fullest. Ya know, keep shhh gangsta, ya dig. Them was da days. I miss shhh. I'm out. Holla at ya boy Jay Pitt yadada bobo!

-Jay Pitt

From The Beat: Instead of spending your money like water, why don't you try investing it into something legal? But, if you're getting it the illegal way, then you'd better plan on giving up more of your life to a bunch of strangers telling you what to do and what not to do, 'cause that platinum chain ain't gonna get you or keep you outta jail.

Love The Beef

To The Beat
I lost a few to the street
But when I get out of here
I'm gone be back on my feet
Some of my homies six feet deep
All because of a thing called beef
I lost a few... trust no one, that's the code of the street
One mo' thing and I'm out... I love the beef

-IllyAck

From The Beat: You may think your life is really sick/But here you are behind walls of brick/You love the beef, but does it love you?/If you think it does, check out your Bob Barker shoe!

These Ninjas Playing With Me

These court people is playing with me. Man, I ain't been to court since May 30th. I was supposed to go to court, but they didn't come pick me up and it's July 10th now. Man, I really be feelin' like going bad so my PO came come up here since she can't come when I call. She don't even answer da phone. What kind of shhh is dat? Man, I ain't got nottin' else to say.

-Quez

From The Beat: It's too bad that sometimes the only way you feel that you can get the attention you deserve is through negative activity! We hope you resist that urge because, while it will get you attention, it will also get you more time!

I Woke Up

I woke up in the morning, looked around to smell the cell, and thought, "Damn! Why the hell am I here? I don't deserve to be in this cold room eating nasty food and going to some stupid school and sitting here in front of this weak-ass TV watching movies I been seen, all because I got caught up with the wrong people at the wrong time?" To me, it's not worth wasting my time in here. All this place does is make me irritated.

-P-Nutty

From The Beat: It's not enough just to realize you're wasting your time (even though it's important). Think about what you really need to do so you won't get caught with the wrong people at the wrong time again. You need a plan more than just a wish. So, what's your plan?

Pros And Cons

I'm getting out on the 17th of July and I won't be back in this piece of shhh no mo' 'cause I'm not gone do no dumb shhh no mo'. I'm gone get caught up and probably go to a groupie. But they gone let me out on monitor.

-Coo' B

From The Beat: What are you going to do to keep yourself from doing the "dumb shhh" that causes you to give up your freedom?

Good And Bad Days In The Hall

What's up Beat? This yo' boy Fat Thug. My good days is when I get my phone call and talk to my family and my young thugs out there. My bad days is when I get mad because when I don't get my phone calls, and when I can't do what I wanna to do up here in YGC. I want o do a lot of stuff up here.

-Fat T

From The Beat: The reason you can't do what you want to do in here is because you are not free! When you are free, you do things that cause you to come in here! So, what's wrong with this picture?

Returning Like A Broken Record

I'm locked up in my cell feeling like an Armadillo
I'm trapped takin' naps on my hard mattress pillow
Two books, two magazines, plus the shirts is green
We wear khaki baggy jeans

Yup, they messed up, won't even give me a trial
I call my lawyer, no answer, all I hear is a dial...

This shhh is foul, c'mon somebody tell the ref,
His whistle's broken; they get away, I get upset
Two minutes 'til rec; it's over, then it's back to the
closed doors

System tryna play me, I'ma come back no more

I'm red hot like a checkerboard, king me

I'm servin' four hours, one down, now I'm doin' three
Spittin' to the juveniles who's in jail — you and me
The people claim we're blind, but who's gonna see, you
or me?

Two to three counts of felonies on my record...

Man, I keep comin' back, looks like a broken record

Man, I rhyme doin' time to the beat makin' records man!

Let's stay crime free maybe we can make a difference

-Chavail

From The Beat: Nice flow, but what do you have to change to stay crime free so you don't have to be behind these close doors? Without changing, the system will toast you like S'mores. Hard as it is to follow the laws, if you don't you'll be stuck in your room chilling in your county draws. This game is like checkers. You can king yourself, and stop playing the same ol' broken records.

Wake Up

I wake up in da morning to da sound of my homeboy's car bumpin' some homeboy beats dat I recognize. As I get out of bed I can hear someone at the door. It's my homie "V." He comes in wit' at least two to four homies at 9:30 in da morning. I get ready, so we can leave. As we step out the door, I see people looking at us wit' a weird look. But it don't bother me 'cause everyone looks at us like dat.

As we leave, I hear the loud sound system my homey got in da car. I see dat everywhere we go people stare the car down. We head to a liquor store in our 'hood. We all going and get about ten 40 oz to start out the day. We head up to da park, hop out da car and place all of our drank on da picnic tables. Sometime, we gotta kick out all da bums out our park, most of da time by force. Other than dat, I just party all day. Sometimes we gotta take flight on those who oppose, but most of da time dere ain't no funk. What I see day by day is cholos, gangsters, broads, violence, drugs, and cars. And dat's what I see every day in Daly City.

-Eight Ball

From The Beat: Is that the reason you are here? 'Cause you be drinking ten 40 oz a day? Seems like a pretty short day. Where do you get the money to buy alcohol and who buys it for you? You can't do nothing in this life without a job, or money, and if you make your money without a real job, then you'll be making money for the system. In fact, you're filling their pockets right now. How does that make you feel?

She's Classic

Your beauty is classic...

Far from average, you're a demonstration of how the
Lord can work magic...

Your attraction is distracting in action

You turn heads and cause bumper-to-bumper traffic...

So sexy, like madness, and we chill... It's all real baby,
far from plastic...

You're lustful, and that can start drama and get drastic...

You bring happiness, I stray away from sadness.

-Payne

From The Beat: She sounds like someone who can help you stick to a plan that keeps you out of places like this. If we had a girl like the one you describe, we wouldn't do anything that gave the system the power to take us from her...

Them Days

Wa's up with the Beat? Yeah, I remember them days and I can't really remember what was the best day. Or the worst day of my life. But I remember them days when me and all my bras was out. We used to do everything together. Other people looked at us as a gang. But that ain't the way I see it, feel me. People need to know that we ain't no gang. We just family, for real. We all grew up together and was just raised in the same neighborhood.

But I wish I can go back to them days, because now it would never be the same between me and my bras. I miss them for real. We all been through a lot together. And now we all locked up (well, most of us). But to all my bras — especially, ma movin' bra and he know who he is — I love y'all and I wish it could be the same for real.

-Hot-Rod

From The Beat: We know people often take the term "gang" and apply it where it doesn't belong. But even if you're not in a gang, you did something to get here, and so did your "bras." That should be your focus so that your future won't be more of this. When you're doing the right things, you won't give anybody the idea that you're a gangster. For real.

Them Days

I think the best day ever was last year on New Years. It was the first time I thizzed before and when I was really blowing wit' ma ninjas. I started my day when ma aunt hooked me up wit' some dough for the day. After that I went to meet up wit' some of ma friends. Then we was smoking and drinking all day, and by the time it started to get dark, we had already heard about hella parties that was going on.

So then one of ma ninja's girl swooped us up in her whip to head to the party. So when she showed up, she bought us a gallon of Bacardi apple and some Smirnoff. We must have drank it in like 45 mins. And we had went to the party after that. Before we went to the party, we went to pick up some thizzles from ma ninja (RIP) Dojah. Then we popped 'em right before we went in. When it hit me, I must have been talking to every girl in the party. One girl want me to go wit' her home, but I decided not to though.

Soon as it hit midnight, we smoked our New Year blunt, and then after that I was so messed up, I had to spend the night at ma friend's house. And yeah, I got the girl's number too. Yee!!

-Twon

From The Beat: Of course it's fun to party, but when you have to get drunk and high to have a good time, you put yourself in the position of doing things you wouldn't ordinarily do, and often those things lead here. Can you figure out a way to have fun without risking your freedom?

Everything

Look what I done for them.
Nothing but love for them.
Busted ma gun for them.
Stayed in the slum with them.
Been on the run with them.
Been in the light with them.
Struggled and fight for them.
Risked my life for them.

But the story goes on. To my main man GF, we been through a lot and have more struggles to encounter. To my mother, I love you for everything you went through for me. To my lady, we been through so much to let go. I love all of y'all more than you can imagine. Always my blood so we forever bleed.

-Hot-Rod

From The Beat: But what have you done for yourself? If you sacrifice your freedom (and maybe more) for "them," then how are you helping "them" by being locked away from them? It's time to think of your own life and your own future and start doing things that keep you with your mother and your lady who are the real ones suffering in your absence.

Hogged Out

My PO wants me to max out 'cause I'm hogged out
Won't put my flag out so she don't want me out
Caught a case couldn't escape
I dropped sales
Now I'm in jail with no bail
I'm tired of staff reading my mail
Sometimes I feel like raisin' hell
They say I might be a son of the devil
Just 'cause I'm a rebel Golden State farmero
Straight up San Francisco makin' dinero
Protectin' my back yard
Like a defense on an everyday Super Bowl protectin' the
last ten yards
Yeah, I got bars
I'm the MVG (most valuable gangsta)

-Lil' Lazy

From The Beat: Well, as long as you're in here, you're only making dinero for the system... Time to figure out a way to make a living (we suggest starting with a foundation of school) that doesn't risk turning you into someone else's slave.

Wipe My Tears

I'm tired of all the banging and slanging
I need a real friend who won't leave me, not forsake me...
Even if the whole world hates me
Who makes me feel like someone in this life
So many younger peers died,
And I wonder why I never got the chance to say good-bye
Look to the sky, pray the Lord can you hear my cry
They say that You can set me free
Protect and deliver me from the hands of my enemy
All because of the blood that You shed on the Calvary
So I'm on my knees begging Lord:
"Please forgive me from this day forward
I promise to follow wherever you lead...
Wipe my tears, Lord"

-Termite

From The Beat: If God hears your prayers, how do you imagine He can grant your wish to be enemy-free? What tools would He give you (or has He already given you) to achieve this goal? (What does your brain tell you?) Do you think that those you describe as your "enemies" also pray to the same God you pray to asking to be set free? As long as you (or they) see God's creations as "enemies," how will the Lord be able to answer your prayer?

Racism In The Hall

A peace officer in Unit 4 let a white person out just because he was white and he said he doesn't belong here. His crime was shooting somebody in the forehead with a bb gun. He got out in two days 'cause of one of the peace officers. Now he's free walking the streets. Young children is out there and this white might shoot them in the forehead with maybe a real gun. He should be in here with us in Juvenile Hall.

-Lil' Bruh

From The Beat: We know that racism exists and is well represented in the criminal and juvenile justice system, even though we can't know if the incident you describe is really an example of that racism or not. But your solution — make the white boy do the time just like the black and brown boys — is an interesting solution to the problem. We'd be happier if they treated the black and brown boys the way they treated that white boy, and not the other way around...

My Life

Let me take you through my pain, misery, and hate.
1991—my lovely mother gave birth to a young Latin playa.

I lived (in the Mission District,) and growing up there was kind of rough fo' my mama, 'cause she wanted to hide me from the reality that I was going to be a gang member.

Every day I would get into trouble,
whether it would be breaking windows or throwing rocks at cars.

-Menace

From The Beat: It seems like your mother tried everything she could to keep you away from the streets so you wouldn't become a gang member. Well we hope you can and will take this story further for us readers you have the gifts to do so.

Wish I Can Fly

Fourth of July
Wish I can fly
Be gone from this place
Hoping to get out early
By saying grace
To my family
I'm a disgrace
Freedom is what
You really want to taste
Only beef in here
Is between sections
Your job is to guide us
Back on the right direction
Let me make a correction
I have no problems
Framed me for robbing 'em
Took away everything from me
Just for chilling with my homies
Wells, I'm a take it
As a learning situation
Like Darwin' theory of evolution
No one believed him
And thought he was crazy
I'm pass with flying colors
Make the judge hazy
I ain't going to be lazy

-Dexter

From The Beat: Among other things, you write that to your family, you're a disgrace. Is that true? If so, in your judgment, how does your doing what you do on the outs, getting arrested affect your family? How has your family treated you? Are you hurting your family?

Black Beast

Born in the jungle
Where I was taught to steal and fight
To hide behind reality
And forget what's real and right
Dressed in all black
To creep like steel in the night
But, yet, I am not a beast
Bears and lions going to war
With flesh and soul taunting the sword
Bullets ricocheting
They fly, break ya core
As the beast still whoops that beezie
Kill the mind
Throw the body to shore
I should of been elected
But I was cheated
Like Al Gore
We just slaves with the mark
That show the scar we bore
But, yet, I am not a beast
As I walk with cowards
Who think they sick
I look at the people
Who starving in Africa
And realize they sick
But I am hair
That needs no jail
I am just too slick
But, yet, I am not a beast
My young ones get killed every day
Whites don't care
'Cause to them
It's the slavery way
Pick up a gun and squeeze
Or throw your life away
But, yet, I am not a beast
Kill a man quick
In a ditch he's swimming
The history don't teach
That whites raped our women
Now they say apologetically
That they wish they didn't do it
But facial expressions show
What they were really into
Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side

From The Beat: You mention that you feel like a slave. It's true that your people were slaves in this country, and there really still are remnants of slavery in our society nowadays, but how do you, personally, feel affected by modern-day slavery? What has happened to you or does happen to you, that causes you to feel like slavery never ended? Who made the choice to come to such a place? Whose choice will it be to live right once you get out?

A Reason To Exit The Game

My good day was when my girlfriend of to years told me that she was expecting. That made me want to stop hustlin' and livin' this crazy life, get a job and provide for her and my child. It made me have a reason to exit the game and live reality. This is always what I wanted — a family and for me to stop this crazy life.

-Knowledge

From The Beat: The easy part of having a family is making the babies. Anyone can do that. The hard part is being a father, which means being there for your child. All the money and things in the world won't make up for a father who isn't there. So, now that you have a reason to step back from the game, we hope you always keep your child's interests first.

Ain't Your Turf

We in LCR
Feeling breaths on your necks
Having contraband checks
Hoping you get 115 or above
Complaining about missing gloves
In school, a .37 or up
You can't mess up
Stay a week or thirty
You will be with a toilet thats dirty
Instead of gurls that's purrry
To you newbs
This ain't a movie
Don't get too comfortable
This ain't a vacation that's relaxable
This is reality, here to learn
Respect and trust has to be earned
This ain't your turf
You messed up
Remember we're here to do time
Not to kick back
Like you just smoked that dime
We ain't at the bar
We in LCR

-Dexter

From The Beat: When you first were sent to the Ranch, how did you learn to adapt to the program? Have you learned anything valuable from it? Anything you want to transfer to your life on the outs?

To you newbs

This ain't a movie

Don't get too comfortable

This ain't a vacation that's relaxable

It's Hard To Let Go

I'm lost and confused without you
Baby, I don't know what to do
Since the day you were gone
My heart, like 9/11 with the Pentagon
If you really love me
You wouldn't went back for him
I thought you would see
Might as well call the grim
Each single day, my heart hurting inside
Miss being by your side
Those four months with you was unforgettable
Your smiles will always be memorable
I can forgive, but never forget
I just let you be with that guy
Let you be happy
You already know me
Live to see you smile
Live to see you giggle
To see you do that
I would travel miles
It hard to let go
It's hard

-Dexter

From The Beat: Did your getting arrested and locked up have anything to do with your breakup? It is so hard to let go. Does being away from her, down at the Ranch where there's little privacy, make your breakup easier or harder for you to endure?

Those Slippers

Wish I have those ruby slippers
Tap three times, be home by supper
Take an angel' flippers
So I can fly away upper
Be away from this evil place
This world I can't face
Away from all this pain
World of hate is what rains
Never have the sun
Where the love for the little ones?

-Dexter

From The Beat: Do you think the world in general is cruel to the little ones? In your experience, in your community, how are the little children treated? What has happened to you, what do you know about the world, that causes you to describe it as an evil place?

I Miss...

I miss my family... It's like on the outs all I get is my family, my homies, and my girl. But once I get arrested, it seems like all of them got taken away from me and the only way I could get them back is earn them back, and that's be getting out of the place.

I miss the money, the females, chillin' with my homies and my brother and cousin. I miss sittin' in the house and smokin' a nice fat chop. The things I miss I can't wait till I get them back.

-Gb

From The Beat: Those people weren't taken from you; you gave the system all the power it needed to take you away from them. We feel you've cheated them just as much as you've cheated yourself! Yes, you can earn them back, but the real question is can you keep them once you get them back?

Trapped

As I look up in da sky I ask the Lord why.
Why my life is messed up and my homies had to die?
I done seen a lot of thangs
Felt a lot of pain
Got a lot of dead homies
RIP in they grave
I'm on the cell trying to get paid
Forget fame
A ninja trapped in this dope game

-Barell

From The Beat: What does it mean to be "trapped in this dope game?" Who built this trap? Who put himself in this trap? Who has the power to free himself from this trap?

On My Mind

All I have is a memory you
Flashin' back on my mind
All I think about is my baby Grumpy
You've been there for me like no other
I've realized that you're my strength
But also a blessing from la virgencita...
And a prayer answered from God
I love you mi vida
I stay up because of you
Because you on my mind

-Stephanie

From The Beat: You're lucky to have someone who's been there for you "like no other." But it appears that you're not there for him... Why is that?

M A R I N

I Couldn't Talk My Way Out Of This

The worst day of my life was when I went to juvenile hall. People were nice enough, the food wasn't bad, and staff was okay. But for the first time in my life, I couldn't talk my way out of this. I was in a place I didn't want to be over something I didn't mean to say. Living here, for me, is bad... my panic attacks are coming back in full force and I have no cigarettes to help me feel better. Hopefully, tomorrow I can go home and start this over.

-Longing For Home

From The Beat: How do you feel now about whatever you said? Learning that there are a lot of things you won't be able to talk your way out of is a lesson you might as well learn right now, like we all have to, some day.

Locked Up And Not Getting Out

The days go by, slow and depressing. I woke up, looked at all four white brick walls, and thought, "This isn't the life for me." People come and go, mama won't call, wearing someone else's dirty draws. Lights don't go off and I stay up all night, thinking, "What's happening on the outs?" The day I took the car wasn't my day. I could've made a different decision and new experiences. I'm locked up and I'm not getting out.

-Kendra

From The Beat: You describe what juvy is like for many. It sounds really lonely, dreary and disgusting. You sound like you've already learned what you need to learn, to keep your freedom on the outs. Can you convince the system that you won't ever take someone else's car again?

I May Miss My Daughter's First Steps

The worst day was when my PO showed up and told me I was going to placement. That was the worst day, because I thought of my daughter and I wondered when I was going to see her again, if I was going to see her first steps and play with her, make her giggle. It worries me that someone else might take my place. I need to live free. I want to see my baby daughter grow. I need to support them. I need to be with them. I love them a lot and it worries me. I need to be free.

-Oscar

From The Beat: We feel your pain, Oscar, but what we want to know from you is why do you risk losing your relationship with them by doing whatever it was that brought you inside?

Y'all Was These Kids

Y'all know who it is. All y'all doing is screaming out, "It the colored," but let me stop y'all and reminisce. Somewhere in y'all lifetime, y'all was these kids, but I know the love talking shhh to me, or he know it a combination of we. But they just can't see people like me is hurting deeply, not just me but the soul of me.

-Star

From The Beat: You're right, almost everyone, regardless of race, messed up somehow and lived some version of the lives many of you in juvy are living right now. Even if some people can see your pain, many may not even look, so can you let people you trust know what is hurting you so badly?

People Like Me

Day by day people like me is getting trapped in the street
 Day by day people like me is always in beef
 Day by day people like me don't think about the consequences that comes with the streets
 Day by day people like me...
 Wait, who is these people that I'm talking about, that run the street? That's starting beef?
 The people that don't think about the consequences that comes with the street?
 Look at y'all.

-Star

From The Beat: You may be very right, that lots of us are implicated in your "People like me..." But what about you? Where are you in all this? Do you run the streets? Why would you start beef? Are you also learning from reading your own writing? You should...it's very wise.

I Lie On My Bed And See The Ceiling

When I waked up
 I looked around the walls
 And looked to my window
 And see the sun
 But a couple minutes later
 I heard the keys of the staff
 And they opened my room
 And I walked to the hole
 To get a broom
 And a mop to clean my room
 After that, I lay down to my bed
 And see the ceiling
 And I eat my breakfast

-Royla

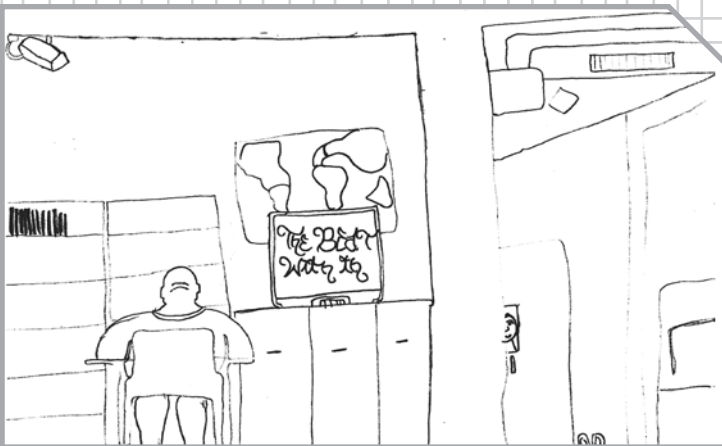
From The Beat: You describe your typical day in juvy. So what do you do to make each day in juvy a little different, more exciting?

I Like Days When My Mom Visits Me

I think that visits are the best day, when my mom come in and I get to talk to her about days that when I was out, she like that day. I like when loved ones can give me mails and pictures, and I like to use the phone to talk to my love.

-Oscar

From The Beat: It must be great to see your mom. Do you write your family and your mom? Who sends you letters while you're in juvy?



I Wish I Could Leave Juvy With My Grandma

Another day waking up in the halls, seeing these same four walls, missing my family, looking at these staffs, waiting to I get out. They're trying to send me to placement. Some time I say, when my grandma come see me, then, when she leave, I say, "Damn, I wish I can go home with her, 'cause I am tired of being in here."

I'm only twelve and they doing all this shhh for nothin'. I just wish I was back in the jungle, but they won't let me. This judge doing this, but I ain't trippen, 'cause I'm always going to hold my block down and he ain't going to stop me from going to go back to the jungle. But if I go to placement, I'm going to hawg up and do my time. For a minute I was thinking about running if I went, but I was like, "Forget it. I'm just going to do my time and get the hell out." But I hope if they send me somewhere, I won't to go far away.

-Stevie

From The Beat: It's really good that you're thinking through your options. If they send you to a placement, you run, and the police catch you, you'll probably go right back to juvy, another placement, or worse. You're really smart to make up your mind to just do your time, so you can go home, stay home and be free!

About To Be A Dad

What up, Beat? I'm just a homie from the streets. They call me "Lonely." I'm from the city of San Rafael. I'm just stuck here in juvy, doing time of my crime. I just wanna be out with my girl who's having my kid in two days. I wanna be in the outs, not in here.

They wanna keep me here for three years. That's too much for me—just 'cause I'm (in a gang.) Before I got here, I was smoking blunts, kicking it. I got caught by a cop. I ain't letting that shhh happen again.

-Lonely

From The Beat: You write that you want to be out with your baby mama when she has your baby, but you know you can't smoke blunts and you can really mess up if you get arrested for anything gang-related. So if you truly want to be there for your child, what are you doing? What have you learned from all this?

Off The Top Of My Head

What's up with it, Beat? This your boy, Jacob, comin' back at you once again. Today I'm going to write what comes off the top of my head.

If you read this
 Then listen up
 And hear what the paper says
 Because my writings hit the brain
 Like some hot lead

Finally I understand
 That doing the crime
 Means doing the time
 So I ain't trippin'
 As long as I get fed

Ten days down
 Dub to go
 One third of my sentence over
 My diploma nearly in my hand
 I long for the end of the show
 Because I'm ready to show
 My PO
 That I am not going to blow
 And in my soul
 I already know

-Jacob

From The Beat: Congratulations on earning your diploma. Would you have gotten it had you been on the outs? Were you going to school out there? What's next for you? Are you thinking about college? If so, why don't you talk to the counselors in juvy and see if you can set yourself up. Get any help now that you need.

If I Was You...

Hey, q-vole (what's up) Beat? Well first of all, I don't think you want to be in my shoes. But if I was you, I would change my life around and make something of my life. I would never be here in the first place and I would be someone different. That's what would happen if I was you.

-Not My Shoes

From The Beat: That's good advice that you're giving, but we wonder are you capable of taking your same advice? If you were in the other person's shoes, what would you change and how? How would you make your life different? And why do you say you wouldn't be there in the first place? We're interested to hear your response and hope that we can all get a response from you.

No Regrets

This morning like every other morning, every other damn morning! I got hella drunk an' high sittin' in my cell, feelin' all twisted, livin' that mas chingon life, always feeling great, never room for feeling down. Maybe in my next lifetime, but doubt it. Having no regrets, accepting my consequences. Tell my family I'm doing great so they won't worry about me. Proud of my every choice. Stuck in the max facin' hella time. I did the crime so ain't trippn', but gots to go now and get high. Late.

-Shadow

From The Beat: We can't believe you're keeping it real when you say you have no regrets... because we don't know anyone who doesn't wish he or she had done something different or not said something cruel or not committed certain actions. We hope having "no regrets" doesn't mean that you're dedicated to doing the same things that led you here, because without change, you'll have a lot more opportunities to get high in that cage...

Them Days

Them days were the best when my son was in my baby mama's belly. I've been a very happy father, but what I think will make it better is to stop getting locked up and take care of my son. I hope things will change in my life for the best, so my son can tell his friends that his Daddy is his hero.

Well, when I get out I plan on being the person that my son will love. He will love me for the type f person I am, not what people say I am. Well, got to go back to my cell so up and out. Late.

-Alex

From The Beat: You have a good goal set up for yourself. Your son already loves you, now you just have to love him back through your actions and dedication to your family. You seem to be on the right track - sometimes being a hero is just being there everyday. Start there.

Expressing My Feelings

I hate this place! It's a waste of time and life. If you say you hate this place, then why do you return? I remember when it was my first time in here, back in the beginning of 2004. I have been away from my family and don't remember how it is to live in society as a normal human being. Having to walk down the streets not worrying about the cops. Well, I can't blame anyone but me for my mistakes.

But, anyways, I don't know why I'm writing this. I guess I just had to express my feelings.

-JSr

From The Beat: We appreciate you expressing your feelings, because that's the main point to our program. However, we ask you what you have asked others, "why do you return?" You're right because we all make mistakes. But you have all the power when it comes down to it. We hope that through you expressing yourself, you can hear the feedback and formulate plans of action to take, in order to become that normal human being once again. Thank you for listening and expressing yourself.

Never Coming Back

This is the last time my pencil touches paper to The Beat Within. I've been in this juvenile hall facility for about two months and already my time is up. I'm gong to get released tomorrow. I started off in one unit, but after I got sentenced they sent me to another unit, then where I am now. And I can't wait till tomorrow. Today I had my last lunch, dinner and activity here. Every minute that goes by I get happier and happier.

Well, I'm out and never coming back to this place.

-Happy and Free

From The Beat: By the time this comes out you will be out, but this piece and response is for everyone still incarcerated. We've seen and read this type of piece many times before, and then some. We hope that you all stay out once you all get out. We know that this is how all of you feel. However, where is the planning on things to do different once back out? As they say, "doing the same things will get the same results." Staying out of those types of places takes more than thinking. It takes action and we can only hope that some of you have come to realize this. Good luck to all!

My Imaginary Morning...

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window. So I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went out to the front door, opened my door and chilled in front of my house, slowly putting a cigarette on my lip and lighting it up. Called my boy if he's here yet, so drove off to a coffee shop, drank some coffee and played a couple of games. Next thing you know, we get this phone call that one of my boys had problems with some dudes.

When we got there, a fight broke out so I jumped out and fought some dude. Next thing I noticed that another guy chased my boy with the machete, so I ran there trying to help him, but ended up getting sliced on my back. But after, I socked the dude so hard he dropped his weapon and I took it and sliced that ninja arm, but it didn't come off. At the end we were out numbered 9 to 5, so we gave them everything we got, next thing you know my boy ended up getting shot. They fled to a near hospital and so did we. Next day we were just at one of my boy's house drinking and talking about what happened.

A'ight Beat, I'm out of time. Till next time, lates!

-Viet Ox

From The Beat: Since you wrote about an "imaginary morning," why did you reflect so much of what really goes on in your life and not let your imagination go? We'd love to read an "Imaginary Morning" piece from you that takes you completely out of your familiar life's circumstances and deposits you in an entirely new and different place - a place without drama, without beef, and with the things that make for a beautiful day, like warmth, water, music, food, etc.

I Turned On The TV And I Saw

When I turn on the TV I see a lot of things. Sometimes I say damn, how can people invent such things and how smart human being really are. But what I would like to see is more reality on TV, as in documentaries about the Juvenile and Adult Systems and how it really is inside prison walls. To show how harsh they are to prisoners and their daily lives.

To me turning on the TV, I expect to see and learn new things. Not fake things such as movies.

-Chueco

From The Beat: Those are interesting things that you want to see. Actually, there's a show on MSNBC called "Lock Up," that does just that. Do you think that sometimes we think that others are responsible for change, when it may actually be ourselves who's responsible? Truly more light can be shined on some of the gray areas that the majority may not know about, but why would I as an individual want to put myself in those gray areas. Wouldn't it be cool if you got out of that predicament and then made your own show/s about what you wished was shown on TV? That way you could tell the story with first hand knowledge. Just something to think about!

Back Again

What's up, Beat? It's James coming form the max. Damn, I thought I would never of come back or write to The Beat again! I wish I could be out there than in here because I just had a baby girl on June 15. Her name is Jazmine.

Me and my homies sat in the waiting room all night. Plus we got locked up together again. That's how we both are back again. I don't know about him but I might be getting Ranch. Being in the max really blows, but like the saying, everything happens for a reason. But this time sucks most of all because my daughter is almost a month old and I'm in here doin' nothing for her.

That's all for now but for my homie, stay up. But when I get out my daughter will have the life she should have and I will be there every day with her. See you next time, Beat. Late.

-James

From The Beat: Damn! We never thought you'd be writing us from the inside again, either, James — even though we hoped you'd keep writing us from out there. It appears that, at least for the time it took you to do whatever it was that led you back here, you were thinking more about your boys than about Jazmine, and that priority has to change. We hope you are able to keep that promise to be there with your daughter every day of her life, because it's you she needs in her life (and it's her you need in yours)!

This Morning

I woke up this morning and had to drain the main vein (go pee). So I got up and pressed the button to open my door. Nobody answered. I looked out my window and staff was sleeping behind the desk, so there was nothing I could do to wake him up but pound on my door to wake him. So that's what I did.

When I pounded on my door and looked out my window, he was still sleeping. He was out cold. I waited about five minutes until I couldn't hold it anymore. I pressed my button like 100 times until I almost pissed myself, when finally the door popped open. I started to speed walk to the bathroom but once I got there the door was locked. So I had to go down stairs to use the bathroom. Finally I got to go. I almost didn't make it. But anyways that's what happened when I woke up this morning. Aight then I'm out. Stay up.

-Flex

From The Beat: In some halls, there is a toilet right in your room. Would that be better or worse, in your opinion? (They complain that they have to sleep right next to the commode.) We're glad you didn't have an accident...

Another Morning in The Hall

This morning I woke up,
the sun beaming through my bedroom window;
Got up, looked out my window of my steel door.
Looked at my roommate and said "Good morning!"
Another day locked up starting to get boring.
As I stare at the lights and count the bricks —
I comb my hair wit' an afro pick.
Early in the morning, I hear voices coming from the
vents —
another person got out and I'm in here wasting my
cents.
Ain't that some shhh?
I'm just wasting my time,
looking left and right seeing people dropping dimes,
in this life of crime.

-Strictly Family

From The Beat: You have a really clever way with words, so instead of 'wasting your time' you should just put pen to paper and write more.

Always A Guilty Conscience

Hey what's crackin'. Beat? Well, it's this homeboy Troubles from streets of Gilroy once again. But anyways, on tonight's topic about being a criminal. Well first of all, when you're a criminal, you know you're doing wrong so you're always on the lookout for cops.

But being a criminal is not always bad because sometimes we do bad things that we think is actually good, or we just do things because we like the adrenalin rush. Anyways, you always have a guilty conscience when you are a gang member or a criminal. But I don't even know what to say any more, so till next time, this abstract -minded vato is out.

-Troubles

From The Beat: Does this mean that you have a guilty conscience, Troubles? If so, what can you do to lessen the burden?

Stuff Ain't Fair

Stuff aint fair, the system don't treat everyone the same.

Stuff ain't fair, the rules to the game ain't never gonna change.

Stuff ain't fair, when you came in for the same case but you get the early release.

Stuff ain't fair, when the door lock, but I am the only one left in captivity.

Stuff ain't fair, when you see that I'm much different just by the clothes that I wear.

Stuff ain't fair, because stuff just ain't fair.

-Giovanni

From The Beat: You're right, Giovanni, "stuff just ain't fair." Which is why we always say the only way to avoid being treated unfairly by this cold system is to get yourself out of it for good! In other words, since the unfair system will never change, it's up to you!

Culture

Q-vole Beaters. I want to ask y'all: Does your culture matter to you?

What do you know about your ancestors or your heritage?

Well, for me I found that my culture is very valuable.

It has a lot of amazing things and it has taught me that I come from a very rich and amazing culture.

Well, my culture or heritage is that I'm Aztec, which means I can kind of speak Nahuatl, which is an Aztec language.

Well Beat, I hope you learned something about me.

Well Beat, until paper meets paper. Alratos

-Jc

From The Beat: Thank you so much for posing these important questions. The purpose behind The Beat Within is to get people to communicate and think about their complicated lives and it is even better when the contributors really participate in this process. You have a rich ancestral heritage that you should be proud of. We look forward to seeing more writing about how your Aztec identity has influenced you.

This Morning

This morning I woke up, with the sun beaming through my bedroom window. So I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door, opened my door and took flight on an enemy, because he's my enemy and he was walking on my block. Anyway, I ended up picking a charge, and back in juvenile hall for a violation of probation and two other felonies.

-Gabriel

From The Beat: So, for the "crime" of waling on your block, this "enemy" got attacked — and you handed over your freedom! Is being a slave of this system worth the beef?

Worst Day Of My Life

What's good Beat? It's yo' uso Giant Samoa about to lay some lines down for y'all again, talking about the worst day of my life.

Well, the worst day of my life was when my cousin Big Al aka Brick Wall passed. You just don't know what I did dat whole week. Me and da usos smoked until we were burn and drank until we were gone. I just couldn't cry for dat ninja. Tears couldn't come down my face. The messed up part was dat my cousin jus' got out the pen for only five years and died. He was supposed to be dead already. When he was at that 7-11, some dudes ran my Uce over.

And there was another day (worst day) was when my grandma died. I was hella ika (mad). I was about to take flight on my roommate but there was some Mexican dude talking shhh in the courtyard, so I beat his ass.

Sole kefe (one lov). Rest In Peace Grandma and Cousin. See you up there. Fa'al (Bye).

-Giant Samoa

From The Beat: We're sorry about both your cousin and your grandma. At least your grandma lived a full life. We bet that she would want the same for you.

Pros An' Cons

In this game there's pros and cons
Cross the line and there's another sad song
I live by an unwritten bound
Day by day another soldier gone
I learned there ain't no right, ain't no wrong
No matter the situation you must stay strong
Live by the gun, die by the gun
Never hesitate, it's either take flight or run
And if you're captured your done
In my life ain't nothing fun
I've seen sight that will leave most men stunned
That's one reason why I say life ain't a game
Headed to CYA and there ain't no playa
Now it's really hardcore gang bang

-Lil' L

From The Beat: As long as you see "no right" and "no wrong," you will be fighting a losing battle that ends with you spending more and more of your life under the control of others. CYA is harder than the hall, and prison is even harder. One of the worst things about those "soldiers" who are gone is that they are mourned for a minute, then forgotten when some new "soldier" steps into their place. That's the way of all wars, including the one in the streets. We think you're worth more than that.

Going From Happy To Sad

Being a lil' girl and living with you were the happiest days I ever had – waking up running to your room and just knowing that you were going to be there, and us going places, and talking and enjoying our days. It was the best years we had.

Even when we were far, we were still tight. But you just had to go to Mexico, telling me that you were coming back. But one night, I hear the phone ring and my mom's eyes going watery and her passing me by and seeing her get her stuff. She stopped and turned to me and said: "I need to go to Mexico, your grandpa passed away." My world came running down. I felt my life is over. Why did you have to go? Why? Grandpa, that day was a sad day for me. I love you. Feel my pain. I miss you grandpa. RIP.

-Squeaky

From The Beat: Even though your grandfather is gone, you sound like you are really treasuring the memories you have of your time with him. Continue to do this and write about him – sometimes the best way to grieve is to write down your feelings and memories.

Peep Game

What it does my fellow inmates? It's your boy Lonely comin' from Santa Clara County, baby! This week just sit back and peep game. This one goes out to my girl.

When it comes to true love girl, you're my only one.
I know even when it's all over we still won't be done.

You gave me my son and millions of chances
And came back every time no matter what the circumstances.

Now I know how hurtful the past is,
But if we made it through that, we can make it past this.

See, things never end the way things start.

But you still hold the key to my heart.

So of course I'ma miss you every day we apart,

It's kinda funny,

'Cause you stay on my mind more then my money.

Baby, I know when you look at life your eyes get runny,

But don't cry honey,

I'ma be back, I swear to God it's true.

Things are different this time, I promise you.

I know what I gotta do and I've thought it through.

It ain't gon be nothing easy but I'm still up in the heezy
doin' my thug theezy

'Cause my son needs me!

Let me leave you with this: always remember, a real man never makes excuses and takes full responsibility for his actions no matter what the case or how serious the charge.

-Lonely

From The Beat: We agree with all your words but we wonder if your actions show that you believe them... For example you say that she is on your mind more than money, but we bet that whatever you did to get here was because you put money ahead of her (and therefore lost the chance to stay with her). We love that you've "thought it through" and that you promise her that "things are going to be different this time." We hope so, because keeping this promise will require all your efforts full-time.

This Morning

I woke up tossin' and turning,
demon in my head steadily reoccurring.
So many demons' shackles on my feet.
Still having dreams of holding the steel,
what's real? I can't figure it,
smoke from the s-o make your ears lift.

-Bad dream

From The Beat: This is a short but powerful piece, even though it seems really personal about memories of violence – everyone can relate to trying to move past their problems. And writing a piece that other people can relate to is the mark of a true poem.

Santa Cruz

My boyfriend Davie and I took a four day trip to Santa Cruz alone. On our third day we spent some time on the Boardwalk. After the Ferris Wheel, we went down to the beach and practically drowned each other. That whole trip is the highlight of my life. Until that particular day, I never liked the beach much. Thanks Davie, for takin' me away and giving me that wonderful memory and the everlasting happiness that came along with it.

-Kitti Katz

From The Beat: This trip sounds lovely and it is good to have memories to savor while being locked up. Next time, think about writing in more details: What did you see on the Boardwalk? What did the ocean feel like? What is a memory of pure happiness from this trip? You're a good writer and should continue to write even outside of these Beat workshops.

Some Things That I Would Change

If I could change anything about my family, I would change the behavior of my aunt and cousins. I would also change the behavior of my uncles and the black sheep's of my family. And the reason I would change these certain people is because they hardly, or never, join us at the family reunions, or on big-get-together-holidays. And when one person is missing it's not complete, or as fun as it would be with everybody there. And when someone isn't there, my grandma gets sad and I don't like seeing her sad, or in a bad mood.

If the whole family attended, then it would be more fun and my grandma wouldn't be sad, or in a bad mood. So that's what I would change with some of my family.

The thing I would change about some of my cousins is that they disrespect their mom's and sometimes they cry for their kids. Their mom's do as much as they can for them, and my cousins still disrespect them and I feel bad for my aunts. And when my uncle's drink, they start to talk and talk, and they start to annoy!

And what I would keep the same about my family is that we all love each other and care for each other. We all watch out for each other.

What I think my family would change about me is maybe my behavior. They say I disrespect them and I don't treat them the way they treat me.

I feel bad. I'm going to change though!

-David

From The Beat: Actually, some of the same things you would like for your cousins to change are also things, your family would like for you to change. And the same way you hate seeing your grandma sad because people aren't around, is probably the same way she feels towards you right now. Knowing this, what are you going to do about this pain and frustration that you are making others, as well as yourself feel? Do you think that as you change your ways, you'll be able to show your cousins and/or uncles and aunts that it can be done? It sounds worthwhile, so we hope that you follow through with your thoughts and feelings.

The Day

What's up Beat? It's me once again, still feeling like a stressed clown. Well, I want to talk about one of the best days in my life. One of the greatest days that I had was when I met my man. It was in April of '07, he was with his homies and I was with my best friend.

We were in a stolen car and my friend that wanted to go to this one street, so we went and that's where I seen him for the very first time. We had nothing to do so we stayed there for a while.

All of a sudden my best friend said: Let's go to Santa Cruz. And we all said yeah, so we went to the beach. We were all really drunk and there was eight people with me in a stolen car – an Escalade. I was speeding about 75 mph on the curves and the car almost flipped on me. But when we got to the beach, we all went in the water and that's when the guy I thought was cute walked up to me and we started talking. He asked me what was my name and we just talked about different things.

That night when we got back to San Jose he asked me to be his lady and I said yeah. Since that day, we have been together even though I've been locked up. I care about him and want to be with him but I got 18 months at placement, so I won't see him for a while, but he will always be in my thoughts and heart.

-Payasa

From The Beat: It sounds like an exciting day to meet someone special but the day could have ended much worse. Do you think your man will help you do the right thing when you get out, or will he be another bad influence with stealing cars, getting drunk and living reckless?



My Lil Sis

Yo Beat, what's good? This your girl Skull Head straight from San Jose. Well, I'm just dropping by to tell you how much I miss my sister.

I got this little sister
who thinks she is always right,
and whenever I tell her something
she tries to put up a fight.

Everywhere we go
everyone thinks she's older,
but what they don't know,
is that even though she younger
she's my little soldier.

She helps me keep my head up
when I'm feeling down and
she knows just the right thing
to turn my frown around.

But now I'm locked up
and I can't see her smile.
I feel like we are so apart
about 20 thousands miles.

We can't laugh together
because I'm in here and
when she is sad

I can't even be there.

I know she is lost without me
because I'm lost without her.
I feel like an animal without it's fur.

So when I get out
I want to make up for this lost time
and have that friendship with her
that so people never find.

So all in all,
I love that bad little girl.

And if I could,
I would give her the world.

-Skull Head

From The Beat: Your poems manage to capture such intense emotions and feelings and scenarios in such perfect rhymes. Have you even put any of your pieces to music? We think you would make a sick rapper.

My Dream Gone Bad

So, I woke up in this messy room,
I went to the kitchen to get a broom.
I looked at my CDs and decided to slap some Mac Dre.
I needed to hear what he got to say to start off my day.
I forgot to clean because I started to go dumb.
Then I went to our bar and drank some rum.
But I thought: 'I can't get drunk, I need to clean my house!
I can drink when I go out.'
But then I stopped, because I got caught in the song.
Then all of a sudden, I realized something was really wrong.
I was not in my bed and I wasn't at home,
and I head this loud noise ringing in my dome.
It was the J-Hall staff yelling through a horn.
To me, this stuff is not the norm
but I had to get up and get my tray.
What could I say?
The worst day you could have is a J-Hall day.

-Skull Head

From The Beat: Another great, funny and interesting poem. We really like how you flipped the topic - "This Morning" - into this crazy dream piece. You've got mad skills, and we hope you continue to develop them.

My Time In Here

Well, today I'm not really feeling the topic. So I'm going to write about my time here. My time in here has been all right I guess. The only thing that is kind of weak is that our old teacher Mr. Brown is gone.

We have some teacher. She is hella impatient with us. She expects us to be all good to her and let her say whatever she wants about us. The other thing that gets me mad is that at the end of class, when she collects the pencils, she just snatches the pencils from our hands. And I feel disrespected when she does that.

Well, that's all I got for now. Till next time Beat. I'm out.

-B Boy

From The Beat: In life we all go through changes and have to adapt to new circumstances. Honestly though, most situations can be better resolved through discussing any differences with that specific person. What you're feeling may be valid and possibly the other party isn't quite aware of your feelings. We believe in problem solving through a respectable dialogue, where all concerns may be heard from both parties. Is this an option, because this is also something that can be applied in other areas of life.

Don't Just Think Of Me As...

Q-vale (What's up) Beat? If you were to spend one day in my shoes, you would probably see things you wouldn't want to. But that's just me, I can't get into any details.

One will be my drinking and drug habit. They are pretty messed up. But not just a bad side of me, I am a pretty good kid when I am sober. I like to help out my jefita (mother) at home and do some work.

But the rest you will see is a lot of drinking, drugs and hella stuff, which I can't say. But yeah, don't just think of me of as a drugged out kid, or an alcoholic.

Well that's it!

-Lil' Man

From The Beat: We won't, but the majority of what you shared were negative things. We'd like to believe that there are more good things you do, even if some things you may consider small and insignificant. What you've mentioned as being your bad side, if you know this to be true, are you willing to do something about it? If you were to eliminate that side to you, how would you look and feel about yourself? Probably good, right? Is it worth at least giving it a try? This may even help your mother out and add to your good side. What do you think?

My Dad

Right now I'm going to write about my dad and family.
I miss my father and family a lot
I wish I could be with them right now.
I messed up and I wish I could take what I did back.
When I got in here I thought I wasn't going to last
without my dad or family. But hey do I really have a choice?
I just wish I could go home and be with my dad and family
I love and miss you very much.

-Matay

From The Beat: What would you do with your family right now if you were with them? How will you correct your "mess up?"

Messed Up Justice

In this state, the justice and the laws are so poor. People say that the State is cool and the laws are right for how we live, but not everybody likes the laws because it messes up people's lives to the point they can't hardly do anything. It kills families and friends to see their friend or brother/sister go to jail over some stupid thing and the laws did it all. I can see people doing stupid things but not to the point that they really have to do hard time for it. Put it like this, if you ain't no killer, rapist or just out right crazy then there should not be any real problem.

Also, people say gangs are bad to society because they do nothing but kill, rob and fight and just be bad. I say: No, that ain't all true because not every gang is like that. Some gangs do make the area safe and peaceful so that people will feel safe. Just because kids get into gangs or any type of thing don't mean you have to put them in a category of being a criminal of any sort. People just need to see more about them, not just judge a book by its cover. Fo' sure, see you soon, till next time, one love.

-Kk

From the Beat: We think you make some good points here. In many other countries, the prison sentence for people is much shorter - usually no more than 10 years for being convicted of murder. But, what is the solution to the problems in our communities? How can we fix the justice system? Perhaps you can become a lawyer or police officer since you have a different understanding from being inside the system.

Something I Didn't Want To Do

There was this one time, when I did something I didn't want to do. Because I knew if I did it I was gonna get into some trouble, that would have got me a few years in here. Something told me not to do it. So my friends started making fun of me and they started telling me things to make me do it. But I thought about it twice and I said, "no."

So that same night they went somewhere, I can't really say where, but they went and did something that got them a ride to CYA. The fact that they got caught doing what they were gonna do, knowing if I would of went, I would have been right next to my friends doing years. Knowing I told my friends not to go because I felt wrong about it. And they still went to do it.

-Alberto

From The Beat: It's a good thing you listened to your conscience on that night. Is this the only time you listened to your conscience that sticks out, or are there others? How about being in your current situation now? Did you not listen to it this time? If so, why not? The story you shared shows that you can make your own decisions, despite the peer pressure. This is a good thing and it may be in your best interest to strengthen your decision making abilities.

Never Change

What's up? This is the one and only back again. Well, here I am again noticing that no matter what happens, or what I do in here, aint nothing gonna change but the damn date.

I mean, you know how you cry over something and its gets old and you just can't cry no more. Well, that's how it is. I've been here too many times for the same thing that happened years ago. It's stupid being in here. The first time is like thinking your all koo. Second and third and after that, it's like it gets old. Like what am I doing here?

No matter what you do, you can't see through the rain. Things will never change. Everything stays the same.

Well, that's it for now. To all in here, keep your head up. Stay strong and smile always. Much love and respect.

-Lil' One

From The Beat: Have you ever heard of the saying, "If you do the same things, you will get the same results?" We ask you your same question, "What are you doing there?" We believe things will only change if you put forth the effort to change them. Honestly! Looking back, did you do anything different each time you got out and eventually came back? More than likely the answer is, "No," right? If that's the case, then that's why you are back. You, and only you, have the power to change. But that's only if getting locked up is really old for you and not "koo" anymore. Seriously though, was it ever really "koo" and why?

Be Within My Roots And Own Soil

If I plant a seed of drugs and drinking, my tree will look very messed up. Because it would be high or drunk all day long. It probably wouldn't look good and most likely be in a very messed up situation like me.

This is only my third week but also my third time and I am really getting sick of this. It's boring and I miss being around other branches in my family. So I want to be a good and healthy plant, and live a fantastic life. Be within my roots and own soil.

So I need to do good and get out of juvie. Stay out and get on track. 'Till next week. Alrato. Sincerely,

-Carmeno

From The Beat: You definitely know what you need and may want. So, how do you accomplish those things and stay on track? What will be some of the worthwhile sacrifices that you will need to make? Can you see yourself making that happen? Most things that are meaningful take hard work, but the payoff is well worth it. Or, you could continue doing things that will bring you back to unproductive, boring environment? The choice is yours to make!

This Morning

This morning I woke up with one eye cuddie
And then my roommate started to laugh 'cause it was
funny

Ooowwww yummy yummy

I must be a fool

'Cause breakfast looks funky

But I eat it anyways

So later on I wont get hungry

Same shhh goes on

Monday through Sunday

I think I'm losing my mind

I think I'm going insane

Everybody in here feels my pain

Well at least I think they do

But if not, coo'

Sorry y'all needs to go

See safe y'all

Sa love

-Tiny Samoa

From The Beat: Are you just using an expression of speech when you say you think you're going insane, or are there things going on in your head that truly worry you? Can you describe what you mean when you say you're losing your mind?

Change For The Best

If I could change one thing about my family, mainly my parents, is that they were born here in the USA. But if they were born here, I would want them exactly how they are. With so much love and their culture.

You ask why? Well, with no papers you ain't getting a job anywhere, besides the under the table jobs.

But I know my family would want me to change my ways. From weed smoking, to stealing, lying, gang banging and whatever negative stuff in my life. But, as they say, "we're all not angels."

-Pacheco

From The Beat: What's interesting is that, even with seeing the struggle your parents are going through, you still choose to do what you do. However, we don't believe you're the only one. Do you think that what you do is helping them in any constructive way? If not, in what other ways can you help them? Don't you think that they would feel a little less stressed, if you were out there helping them and not hurting them? How would you feel if you were in their shoes? Does this motivate you to do anything? We'd hope so!

Them Days

Good days, bad days and regular old days. Life for me can go both good and bad. I try to make everyday a good day. Life for me can be good most of the day, until something happens. Everything was fine until I ran into this one guy. Everyone at the park was having fun, not having no drama. Me being a 17 year old that's 5'4" I can be put down a lot. He was 20 and was twice my size. I was pushed...

Now I wake up hoping for a better day. Avoiding trouble, but no one can respect good until the day is over.

-Lai

From The Beat: Days are like that. Some can be good and some can be bad. What's good to know is that we have the ultimate power, when it comes to how the day ends. Haven't you had days that ended up good? And vice a versa? Really, we hope as much as we can, but if we don't put any action behind the thought, then that's all it really is, a thought. You'd be surprised how many people respect good during the day. For those that don't, well, now you know who, what, and why to avoid them.

WHAT ABOUT US?

What about us?

Everyday kids getting busted

For a little piece a shyte

Even though we didn't mean to do it

Because we're still young and stupid

But they don't care all they see is money

In their eyes we're nothing

They don't know what we're going though

Why we running like maniacs and being a fool

Try to make money, rather than going to school

People living on the streets

The government don't care, they act like they don't see

They only see the rich and the power

They making \$10 in less then an hour

We have struggles

But they don't see the trouble

To them we little kids

But you know what this is how we gotta live.

Peace out Beat!

-P-L

From The Beat: What if someone, who wasn't in the government, mentioned that there are young people out there trying to live, who aren't running around like maniacs and acting a fool? How would you respond to that person? We hear you, wages nowadays don't match the actual cost of living. So some have chosen to do what they do. But some may argue that having an education would at least place a person in a better position, than say someone without one. Would you agree, or disagree with this and why?

Princess On The Run

Hey, what's up Beat readers? This is your girl coming at you with much love and respect to all in here.

Well, as you know, I got sent to the ranch for the six to eight month program. The reason why I'm back in is because I ran!

To the ones who know me, I'm sorry. I love you so much, but I wasn't in the right state of mind. I regret what I did now and I feel dumb.

I ran with my girls. We messed up ourselves pretty bad. We're all in crutches. One of my girls broke her leg. The other one tore her ligament. Me, I sprung my ankle. One of my girls barely made it over the fence when she got caught. The other one got caught down the hill. I made it all the way, but then I turned myself in. I am so proud of myself.

But anyways, now I have court on the 11th of June. I don't know what the hell they're gonna do with me. Well, enough with that.

How is everyone doing? I hope everyone, including the one I love, is holding up. Don't forget get brother that, "it's not love, so don't get it twisted." Oh yeah, I hope to see you.

Well, to my brothers on the outs kickin' back, I miss them so much. Well, times running out but I'll write next time. Much love and respect.

-Princess Davina

From The Beat: How were you "not in the right state of mind?" What was going on with you at the time? It sounds like you were in the right state of mind when you turned yourself in, so what was the difference? Do you think that possibly you put more stress on yourself and others who care for you, by running? What did you hope to accomplish from doing so? Wouldn't it have just been easier to do the time and do what they want from you, so you can get back to the streets without having to look over your back? The outcome from this may not be something you're ready for, but hopefully you realize that it's something you need to do. Fortunately for you and your friends, you all weren't severely hurt. If there's a lesson you learned from this incident, what would you say it is?

One More Chance To Redeem Myself

What's up Beat? Back up in the hall in this unit, but that's besides the point.

If I could write a letter to the new me, I would tell myself don't head down the wrong direction. Because I never had anybody to guide me to the right path. So with the knowledge I have right now, I would take it and put it all together. And have a better life for not only myself, but for my family.

I would also wish if there is a Christ, he could hear me and give me one more chance to redeem myself. To prove I could be a productive member of society. I'm just not the stereotype that people see 'cause of the baggy pants and the tall T's.

Basically that's all for me. Everybody in the struggle facing some hard time like CYA, keep the faith. For those who do believe in Jesus, go to Him when you are in need.

So until next time Beat. This young man will talk to you homeboys and homegirls later.

-Merino

From The Beat: We eventually learn how to make better choices by seeing how choices we've made in the past have affected us. Think of things in these terms, you will get another chance eventually. So knowing this, what do you do in the meantime to better prepare yourself for that chance? Is education something you feel will better your chances in the future? If so, where are you and what do you need to accomplish? How about a job? Are the people you have now as friends, those that will support you in breaking stereotype/s? If not, what do you do with them? Do you continue to keep them around you, or find those that will support you? Right now you are being guided, but it's up to you applying what you know and are presently getting.

Side Shows

Side Shows to me is the funnest thing to do in this whole wide world. Most of the side shows I go to are in the Town (Oakland). Side shows are car shows... lots of Scrapers (old school cars all fixed up like Buicks, Impalas, Cadillacs, Cougars, etc. Oh yeah, and all the Scrapers are on Dubs. Shiny rims... nice rims, mostly over 20 inches. Also, most of the Scrapers (well, basically all of them) are Candy painted with lots of slap in the trunk.

At the side shows, we bump Hyphy slappz, or whatever we may bump while dudes put on shows (do doughnuts, dip, yolk, gas, break, go stupid, go dumb, ghost ride, and etc).

Ghost riding the whip is my favorite! It is when the driver and whoever is in the car gets out of it while it's in motion and just goes dumb, while the car is rolling by their side.

Going stupid and going dumb is a form of dance, originating in the Bay Area, where people just lose it. Shake dreads so hard it looks like their necks are going to break.

Hyphy was created by the great Keak Da Sneak from Oakland. I honestly don't know how to explain Hyphy. It is kind of like you just got to know 'bout it.

Side shows happened right in the middle of the hood, you feel me. And there is always a lot of heads. Usually over seventy, even sometimes over a hundred. There is always sexy dudes there. Always a ton of fine dread heads fitted from head to toe, with they grills gleamin'. So stunning.

The first side show I went to was deep in Oakland. It smacked so hard. Me and my cuddies was off hella grapes, yadaddimean. And pink and green smiley faces. The whole block was filled with beautiful Scrapers and hyphy dudes. Females going dumb, throwin' their turfs up.

Then after me and my cuddies went to a function. It was smackin' before it got shot up. Then we all bounced back to my cuddie's house.

But the best side show I ever went to was in Stockton. Damn, we shut down the freeway! There was hella heads just doing it live. Then the dudes in front took an exit to the freeway. Still going dumb slow, hangin' out the window and next thing you know everyone followed. Next thing you know the freeway was moving at like five miles and hour with scrapers switchin' lanes. Dudes ghost ridin', but within like five minutes the po po's (police) came and everyone hit ghost quick. But I'm saying though, it smacked dumb hard.

Well to wrap up my writing on side shows, if you ain't been to one get with it fast. Fast like a Nascar and hit one up. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

-Kelani

From The Beat: You've just enlightened us and others who may not know much about side shows. Your writing was pretty descriptive and we could actually see some of the things you were sharing. How did you first hear and come to know about side shows? You mentioned one bad thing as a result of attending a side show, the shooting. Are there other things that could go wrong and/or possibly be dangerous at one of these events? Do you think that there may be safer ways of holding some of these events? Or is it just too unpredictable? Because it sounds like that's the nature of the event.

TV

I don't watch TV. It stresses me out because I don't learn anything productive, and I get negative insights on myths and tales. Best way to learn is through education.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: We're with you. We know that occasionally, there's genuinely good stuff on TV, educational stuff, too. But sorting through all the garbage takes way too much time. Better to read a book.

In The Streets

Living in the streets on my own. I was 11 years old on the streets. I didn't go to school. I figured school wasn't for me. So I was just brought up in the streets of San Jose. The only thing that I really did was stay at a friend's house. Looking at how to make some money.

So what I did was started to get into drugs and that's how I made money. Sold really everything just to put food in my mouth. Also I was stealing clothes to put on my back. But why over the years I was growing up, I met a lot of people that liked me and didn't like me. There are a lot of enemies in the world, so I had to protect myself by getting a weapon. I thought by doing that, nobody would be able to mess with me.

I had people who had my back. They said, "They did," but they really didn't because I wouldn't be here. I took all the blame and I am looking at a couple of years in here. And nobody here helps me besides the streets. So I believe the streets ain't for me.

-Nasty

From The Beat: During your story you never mentioned your family, so we can see why the streets eventually became your family. Is your family not around, or supportive of you? From your story and from what you said, "the streets ain't for you." If that's the case, where does your future take you after you get out? Do you see yourself getting back into to school, to get that education that may take you out of you're at? The so-called friends that weren't there, do you go back to them? We feel now is the time for you to make smarter and wiser choices, and trust that you're capable of doing so.

Mail, Phone Calls, and Visit

What's up Beat? This is your boy. Well for me mail, phone calls, and visits are all my highlights because when I get mail from my baby girl, her letters make me a lot happier in here. When I get to hear her voice, that makes me even happier. Because she always tells me she is going to wait for me until I get out and will not cheat on me. 'Cause she loves me too much for her to do that. So phone calls are a big reliever for me. Visits are also good because I see my mom. She and my girl are the only reason I don't stress in here.

Well I got to go call my lady and write her. Late.

-Ben

From The Beat: We're sure they bring you happiness while you're in there. And you may be more fortunate than others. But can you keep those relationships going and strong from where you're at? If you were in a relationship and your girl kept getting locked up, how long would you be able to put up with that? Wouldn't your relationships be even stronger if you were out participating in them? Thank you for what you shared!

Words To All

My fellow inmates - its your Estrella India dropping some linas. Well today's topics I'm not feeling very good. These days just keeping my head level and my smailers square. Well, they're trying to send me back to the ranch. I don't think that's gonna happen, but we'll see. The system ain't no joke these days. They're sending everyone to different places, especially the ranch and YA, which is messed up because half of us don't even deserve it. I just want to tell those who are looking at hard time, especially my only brothers, to stay up. No matter what, you can make something out of yourself - no matter where or who you are. To all, be koo and love, honor and respect to all who know me.

-INDIA

FROM THE BEAT: India, how does one go about the difficult job of making "something out of yourself"? How, for instance, will you go about it? It's OK to write off topic, but when you do, educate us, please.

Questions

Today I'm going to write about people trying to define me. I don't like that. I don't let no one define me. People think different when they see me. They don't even know who I am. They may see my behavior and all my actions, but they don't really see me for who I really am.

If I were to see a pretty girl and got to meet her, and shake her hand. That girl will see me deep down. You know what I'm trying to say? Don't judge people.

Also, right now I'm already nine months in and I'm fed up with this place. Yeah, I know I should have never done what I've done, but I learned my lesson. Check this, this is always in my head; "in life there are no mistakes, just lessons that are repeated till they are learned."

Life is not a road of roses. But I'm really going crazy, hella stuff is going on. Crazy stuff in my head. I hate being in my cell. Well, everyone's mad?

I'm out. Gone.

-Ira

From The Beat: If our actions are totally different from how we are being judged, then we have nothing to really be concerned about. But it's also good to be open-minded. However, we also shouldn't really concern ourselves with something we have no real control over. Which is other people and what they do. It's really all about you and your actions. It sounds like you already know there will be struggles, so you kind of know what to expect in life. All you can do is learn that lesson you're suppose to be learning so you can move forward. Remember this, we don't have to join people in their misery, know what we mean?

Them Days

What's up Beat? I'm going to start this tough subject off by sharing something that is in my heart. Well, the worst day of my life was when my mother slipped and fell in a store and died instantly. But I try not to think about my loving and caring mother too much.

As for my best day, I wouldn't say I have one. They're all good - right? I'm still living, and I can't cry all the time. I have to move on at some point - right? But to everybody who's lost a loved one - hang in there and keep faith. Good luck to everyone who's getting out. Stay out.

-Merino

From The Beat: It's true that you can't cry forever, but you should cry when you need to. When you've cried enough, you'll know it. You'll know it because you'll have stopped crying. So don't bottle up your sorrow. Let it out. One way to think about it is that you are honoring your mother when you cry for her passing. When you've spent your tears for awhile, begin to plan for the life you'd really like to live. It will be different from the life you've had. It can be much better. It will require hard work, kindness and consideration. You must be kind to yourself. You must acknowledge that it's right to mourn and cry, and that soon it will be right to work hard on the problems that have led you to the hall. We know you've already begun to work on those problems and our heart goes out to you. Thanks for sharing your sad and difficult story with us.

Them Days

Them days I've had have been full of ups and downs. Sometimes, I feel life just takes me to that limit. Up and down, almost like an elevator. But when I think about what's the happiest part of my life - the best thing that ever happened to me - it would have to be my two little nephews. Since my sister was too busy selling drugs, my mom decided to take care of them. Me, being their uncle, they look up to me as sort of a father figure. It gave me a sense of duty and responsibility to make sure they don't make the same mistakes I went through. It makes me keep myself in check.

-Bobble Head

From The Beat: Being a role model and a father figure for your cousins seems like a really good way to get your life on track. Are you still able to fulfill this duty while you are locked up? Perhaps you can try by sending them letters for your mother to read to them while you are away.

Who Really Cares?

What's up Beat? It's Sleepy. Well today's topic is mail, phone calls, or visits. Well, to be honest I like either of those. But it makes me wonder as I am writing. I am listening to how they go over the topics. And they brought up a good point. They said, "When you're locked up you could see who really cares and is your true friend."

Now that I am locked up, I don't get any letters from my so-called friends from the outs. And the only person I could talk to and see are my parents and my daughter. Although I can't see my wife, but that makes me wonder if my baby momma really loves me. This is my second time locked up. The first time I got locked up, I got like 5 letters out of the 45 days I was locked up. But whenever I called her, she was happy, so I didn't trip.

Now every time I call her, she sounds like she don't wanna be on the phone with me. She tells me she's sad, but I know her and she don't sound sad. She tells me not to call her anymore because her parents trip on the phone bill. But she told me to write to her. I've been locked up for 20 days now. I haven't received any letters and I sent a couple. And it makes me wonder, would she wait for me for real? She said, "She will." I guess it's all up to God and destiny to see what's gonna happen. But no matter what, I'm gonna be happy because I got a daughter in my life to live for.

I don't doubt her. She has proven to me many times and in many ways, that she loves me and that I am the one and only. I guess I am tripping bad, because summer is coming up and she's gonna get a part time job in the mall. If she don't leave me, that's gonna prove she only got eyes for me.

Well Beat, I know I got a little bit off topic but that's something I had to get off my chest. So I can finally rest. I would appreciate some advice from you guys because the advice they give me here is all bad. Well Beat, thank you for letting me write.

-Sleepy

From The Beat: We are no love experts by any means but hopefully what we say will help. Some things in time will answer themselves for you. It sounds like the first time she wasn't too shaken up about it, because it was your first time. However, this is the second time and she may be wondering is this becoming a pattern for you. How would you feel if you were in her shoes? Having a child is hard enough as it is. Not having the other parent around to help out with the raising of the child, makes things even more harder. Your actions are all you really have control over. If you want to keep what you have? Then it may be wise to change some of what you're use to doing. Do you think you can do this? Is it worth doing? We believe you to be a smart enough individual to know the answers to these questions.

No more tears. No more family pain. Just do what I know you feel is right. Don't care about what other people say.

Planting A Seed Of Drugs And Drinking

My tree would look like this...

If I planted a seed of drugs and drinking

I think like this...

When I grow up

I am always going to be out in the streets

But the worst thing I could think about is this...

I am going to be poor

I am going to be walking

With my mattress on top of shopping cart

Dirty

No clothes

People making fun of me

I wouldn't like that

I would like to have my own family

My own car and my own house

My own money to support my family

And help out my mom dad

To get their own house too and live happy.

Well Beat, that's all I got to say. I am out.

-Thinking

From The Beat: It sounds like you definitely have an idea of how you could end up by using drugs and alcohol. Having this knowledge, does this make you want to do anything, if you haven't already started, towards accomplishing the other more constructive things you want out of life? If not, what's keeping you from doing what needs to be done in order to accomplish some of the things you want out of life?

Them Days

Them days is shady

I'm sittin' in the hall goin' crazy

But it's coo

no one's gonna fade me

That's why it's all gravy

it's that lil' homie

Travi baby

-Lil' Travi

From The Beat: It won't be so 'coo' if you don't shape up. Keep on doing what you've been doing and this is just the start of a long career in prison interior decorating.

Dear, Old Me

You have many problems with you that you need to change. You've been saying you're gonna change, but never do it. You need to change this time. You've been in and out of here too many times. Next time you come in you'll go to the Y. The Y is a waste of time.

You need to solve your anger problems and find out who are your real friends. I see you changing little by little. Take it one step at a time. I can tell you're tired of all this coming in and out. No more tears. No more family pain. Just do what I know you feel is right. Don't care about what other people say. If they ain't with you, they ain't your homie. Don't deal with them.

The people that know your family, and shed tears for you will always be there for you. Remember, just take it one step at a time. No more drama, no more grief. Just be happy.

Sincerely,

-Avalani

From the Beat: You mentioned working on anger problems and that's definitely a step in the right direction. You also mention choosing better friends and that will also put you in a better position. What are some other things that need to be worked on? It sounds like you're in the right frame of mind and know what needs to be done. For your sake, we hope that you connect with right people that will point you in the right direction. Do as you stated, take things one step at a time because change is a process. As time passes by and you reflect on where you may be, you'll see how far you've come. Stay true to yourself and those who genuinely care and want the best for you.

Me?

What it do Beaters? You know who it got to be, the one and only. So today I'm going to write about a couple of occasions where I thought, damn, it could have been me.

Well, the first was my homeboy. We were at school kickin' it one day and the next day I came through he wasn't there. So I figured he ditched. Then my homegirl told me he got shot and killed the day before. I just went home and did a lot of thinking. A lot of dank smoking 'cause that was my first loss.

Not one month later my homegirl died drunk driving on 680 (freeway). She hit the center divider and flew through the windshield, and died soon thereafter. I got the info from my mom and that is when I thought, "Damn, what if it was me?" 'Cause I drive drunk and rarely wear seat belts. So yeah, you would think I would have learned after that, but I didn't. I damn near crashed driving, couldn't walk faded before I got locked up.

Anyways, I kinda got off track but here's another time. The same thing happened to my other homeboy. He wrecked thizzin' and on something, and he's a vegetable now. That could have been me 'cause while I may not smoke, I thizz and drive. So yeah.

Well, I'm gonna close this piece for now. But keep your heads up to all my homeboys and cousins in here. Don't let them bricks get you down. Late.

-Looney

From The Beat: All the things that happened you shared were very unfortunate. You're very fortunate to not have had anything like that happen to you. Especially since you acknowledge doing the same type of things. How long do you think you can continue to do the same things and not end up with the same results? Hopefully you can stop thinking and start acting on that, damn it could have been me. Because you've seen first hand and experienced the pain of how drugs an alcohol has affected others. Some things just aren't worth it, wouldn't you agree?

My Happy Day

Me and my niece Victoria go to Sweeties Candy Store and get all kinds of candy: Airheads and Bubble Gum Ice Cream. After that, we go to the park. I would watch her play on the playground. I feel like I am free and I can do anything I want to.

-Lil' Love

From The Beat: This sounds like a great day. We like how your memory is all about feeling free and being with family. Keep working on your writing and it will get easier!

The Reason Why I Changed

This is going to be my last time in juvenile hall because I am a changed boy. Also, I am already 18 so next time, it will be next door with the big boys. The reason why I actually changed is because my girlfriend is pregnant. It hit me hard when she told me that she was pregnant. So that day on I told myself that I'm going to be there for my lady and kid. I don't want my kid to be like me, because my dad wasn't there for me and I don't want to be like my dad.

So that's why I stopped doing what I was doing, that could get me locked up for a long time. When my lady told me she was pregnant I was on the run at the time. So after she was two months pregnant, I turned myself in. And now I'm doing two months hall time.

I want to be there when my lady is giving birth. That's why when I get out, it's going to be the new me.

Sincere,

-Attitude

From The Beat: You made some wise choices and we hope that you continue to do so. You've learned a valuable lesson from your experience that leaves you wanting more, and giving your son more. That's a good thing. Raising a child is hard but well worth thing to be a part of.

Carpe Diem

Seize the day...

So many kids messin' up in the bay
Violence and poverty

It just doesn't make any sense to me
We got the resources

Why don't they just take advantage?
Life could be cool

Wastin' time, sellin' drugs like a fool

Your time would be better occupied if you were in school

You could be something great

But instead your heart is filled with hate

Have careful planning in your life

And maybe your future can include a fine wife

Girls like successful men

I know I want some love

And I'm fed up with that stupid glove!

Seize the day!

-Frank

From The Beat: What you mentioned is true and sounds like you speak from experience. So how do you "seize the day?" You've definitely outlined some things that need to be done.

In My Neighborhood

It's just a normal day in the life I live. But it ain't normal. Well at least that's what I hear all the time from older, wiser folks. I haven't seen much outside of my city, besides Mexico, to know that it really aint a normal neighborhood.

There's a majority of gang bangers and everybody's either selling drugs, or coppin' drugs. That's where a lot of hits come in. You never know if the next day you're coming home safe. On the streets, I try to stay away. Watch my back and who's around me. Sometimes people get jumped, or killed for being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

In my neighborhood finding a virgin is like finding a unicorn. The air is polluted with smoke. And I love it. Trespasser's who try to take over, or who knows what else, can get checked or end up blasted. I grew up around here since I was six. I've seen many things growing up here and I also been doing many of these things I've said!

-Adrian

From The Beat: What you mentioned is true because that is what you see, and what you have experienced. However, listening to the older, wiser folks, there is so much out in the world that we never really allow ourselves to experience. Why is that? Why do we limit ourselves to what we know? Is it because of the comfort zone we may feel? Is it because we may feel if we go somewhere else, new, that we don't know what might happen to us? We all have pride from where we came from, but it's also good to experience new things that aren't so chaotic. Allow yourself that opportunity because those older people aren't wise and still around for nothing.

The Day I Went To Court

I went to court happy thinking I was going to get out, getting my hope up. I wait and wait making those many hours very scary for me, but when I go in (to court) the judge just tells me nothing, so I get out of the court room crying and my dad mad I didn't get out while my dad's leaving out the door. I return to my unit crying because I didn't leave. Well that's what happens when you come to this place.

-Bianca

From The Beat: Yes, this is a hard lesson, but once you mess with the law, they take over. The time is now to work on regaining your freedom and living a life free of the system.

When I Turned On The TV I Saw

I saw Lock Up. It was about San Quentin State Prison. It's crazy there. I have a bunch of homies there and they tell me that it's the place I do not wanna be. So they educate me on that type of life. That makes me wanna be good, because if I don't, that's the place I'll end up going to.

-Kevin

From The Beat: Now you're thinking. But thinking is one thing and acting is another. You really need a plan Kevin, a plan that will keep your time accounted for, every day. You need to get your high school diploma, and then, maybe even more education - read The Beat Without section too! We know you have a child on the way. Think about your child. What kind of a dad do you want to be? What does your child deserve?

I Turned On The TV And This Is What I Saw

I saw this freakin' crazy wrestler who killed his seven year old son and moments later killed his wife. And then the crazy guy killed himself. They were trying to say that it's some crap like steroids that made him mad and do all the stupid stuff. But the sad part of this was that his son looked up to his dad like he was a hero. That's what makes this world crazy.

-Jose

From The Beat: That, and a few other things we could mention. If you could, how would you help make the world a less crazy place?

I Turned On The TV And

When I turn on the TV I see a lot of things. I see girls in bikinis, rappers, news, violence, and animals. To me, TV has its goods and its bads. The good thing about TV is that it keeps you informed about what goes on in the world and you learn a lot of things about nature. I personally don't watch a lot of TV. I have better things to do. When I do watch TV, I like watching Animal Planet.

-Arnolfo

From The Beat: You sound very sensible. Please tell us about those "better things to do". Do you enjoy reading? If you've been doing much reading lately, you know that your generation is quite literally going to have to save this planet, for animal life and human life. We older folks have made a mess of things and as unfair as it is, your generation is going to have to work hard to make this world a better place. Are you ready for the challenge?

This Morning

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window. I quickly got up, washed and dressed, walked to my front door and opened it. That's when I realized that I'm still here, in juvy. I'm not at home. It felt like I was with my brother, but I'm not. I'm always thinking about him and always saying in a few more days I'll be able to see him. It sucks today, because today is my brother's birthday.

-Eddy

From The Beat: Hey, a few more days.....

Today It Was Good

Today it was good because I got to stay out 'til 9:30. And it's good to be writing. I never write because I'm not good at writing. I get to talk to my new friends a lot, and I'm not alone. I need to get out of here because my family needs me to help them. I need to change for my family. But I have to change for me, too.

-Ismaya

From The Beat: Ismaya, writing is like anything - if you practice it, you get better. And you're already getting better. We here that you'll soon be owning a dictionary. That's cool. Use it everyday. And keep writing.

No Outs

When I was growing up on the streets of my hometown, at a young age I started kicking it with gang-bangers. I liked what I saw, and now I'm one, myself. And now it's too late to get out. I wasn't planning on getting out, anyways. That's my life now. I got in because I would get all kinds of love from the home boys. Since a young age I've been banging, and I love my life.

-B

From The Beat: We understand why you got in. Everyone wants love and everyone needs love. If we aren't getting it, we seek it out. Sometimes we make the mistake of finding love in the wrong places. Here's a little test for you, and it's only good if you answer it honestly. If you had a child, would you want your child to become a gang-banger? Or would you want your child to find all the love he needed at home? We bet that just about every one of your banger friends would rather have found the love he needed at home. Let us know, if we're mistaken. By the way - there is "an outs". But you have to want it, first.

Wings

I wish I had wings to escape from this place. At night time, I think about my future, and it causes me pain, because I know I'm going in the wrong direction. As I pick up new charges, I sink further in the hole. But I'm going to climb out on the ladder of hope.

-Juan

From The Beat: Juan, don't wait for the night time to think about your future. Each day, do something positive, something that will help you become a better person. Even in juvy, you can do something nice for someone, every day. Begin to educate yourself. You could actually read yourself into a better future. Devour books. Examine your past. Learn to understand why you've done what you've done. Keep in mind what the great historian George Santayana said: Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Build a better future, Juan. Start now, today.

The Worst Day

The worst day of my life was when I came to juvenile hall for this charge. I could be locked up for a long time. I've been here for six months. Six months ago I was kickin' it with some homies and we were getting high, and drinking some beers. And here I am.

-Hector

From The Beat: What have you done in the past six months to prepare yourself for whatever comes? You can't just wait for the future. A famous poet once said this: The world understands nothing but words, and you have come into it with almost none. If you learned five new words a day, at the end of a year, you would have 1,725 new words in your vocabulary. You know what they say - knowledge is power. So, if you want the power to control your own destiny, get busy. The basic tools are words. And words are almost free.

Today

I'm writing today about some of the emotions that I've been through during the last year. Well, it's not that bad, but I was incarcerated for 11 and a half months for mistakes I made. When I got out, I thought I was a changed man, but I guess thoughts and feelings can be deceiving.

So, month later after doing those 11 and a half months, I'm back. And I'm facing from 1 to 5. I know I can change, but I guess the DA's tired of giving me second chances. So I guess no matter what, it's up to me to show my family that I can get back on my feet.

So Beat, it's been nice writing to you again, even though I hate the circumstances that I'm in.

-Edgar

From The Beat: We don't like the circumstances, either, but we like hearing from you. We'd like you to think long and hard about what it would take for you to make the changes you know you have to make. We want you to come to an understanding, a deep understanding, of yourself. It will require effort and will power and a lot of concentration. But it's your life. We all want to be happy. And the road to happiness starts with self-knowledge. Ask us for ideas about how to get started, if you get stuck.

This Morning

I woke up to the sound of the guard "get up make your bed." At 6:30am "we will pop the doors, stand on your line, get up!"

I slowly wipe my eyes, make sure my bed is tight with no wrinkles, then 'click' the door pops opens and the day starts.

Arms behind me, still half asleep on my way to breakfast, then the words can't even describe the food. It's the first thing you want, first thing in the morning.

Afterwards back in our cold, scratch that, freezing cold room.

-Big D

From The Beat: Big D, it must be hard to wake up every day like you do. It's time to change your way of life so you don't have to find your self being woken up to a voice over a speaker and to a click of a door that you have no other choice but to get up and start the day.

Them Days

You a front put to shame.

Moving your body to the beat man that's lame.

Messin' with a soldiers that are deep in game.

Never caught mouthing off with you emotional posers, always dawging, always stepping but never willing to stunt. You boys need to get your mind right,

'cause when I step it's this or that or it's gonna be a fight. Us soldiers always keep our game tight.

If I catch a 'm' case guarantee I'll be on the next flight.

We boys sleep in the day and creep in the night don't give a 'crap' move cash all night,

all the girls in the hood know our game is tight.

Don't 'mess' around

unless you wanna find yourself in your mommas mail box. Never get caught always using detox.

I ain't tripping just Cadillac pimpin'

-Paul

From The Beat: Your second sentence caught our attention. "Moving your body to the beat man that's lame". We at The Beat, hope that your statement is not in reference to us at The Beat Within? If it is we would like to know why the beat is lame? With the piece that you wrote if it is the way of life that you are living, there could only be one of two out comes, prison or death. Think of a way to change your way of life, every thing is not about gangs and violence. There has to be a better way. Tell us how things can change in your way of life and your way of thinking.

Them Crazy Days

Them days were crazy,
just a baby being raised in Albucrazy.

Living life day by day

Tryin' not to go insane.

Pick up on some 'YA' just to get a pay.

Living as a thug always packin' slugs.

Ain't never left in the dust

living off my gang and street fame.

Nothin' to brag about

jus' some thing I've been raised around.

I an't ever going down.

I'll be repaid in the street

even when I'm RIP,

that's respect G.

-Lift'em

From The Beat: Lift'em, it's saddens us to hear when a child is raised around drugs, and violence. That is no way for any child to be raised, but it happens. You say your going to be repaid even when your "RIP that's respect" how is this so? Are you being raised in "Albucrazy" or is this your child be raised in "Albucrazy"? Is there a way for you to change the cycle of the gangs, drugs and violence? If so tell us how you want to make that change, and how you can raise a child in the place you call "Albucrazy".

Unequal Justice

In a country run by capitalistic greed,
it's more then natural

for the people who are supposed to serve and protect
to take advantage of their power f
or financial gain (or any).

Police, Judges, DA's, none treat all people the same.

-Nick

From The Beat: Its easy to say, "None treat all people the same" when your in a situation where you want to get out of detention. It is true that there have been cases that officials with power have used it to their advantage, but in the end they also have been caught breaking the law. It sounds like you simply dislike Police, Judges, DA's and other people with authority. You are being treated by your actions, and it is hard for you to accept the responsibility of your actions. Put your self in their place and see just how you would react to the situation at hand.



A Near Fatal Days

One morning I woke up and I was having a good morning.
I got up and got ready, and left my pad.

When I was leaving my pad I got shot at and almost got hit, so I crashed my car, so I started to shoot back, then I got caught and that was the worst day of my life.

-Vincent

From The Beat: It's good to hear that you did not get killed, but the big question is why were you shot at? No one gets shot at by simply walking out of their house, there had to be a reason. Tell us what you could have done to change the situation of getting shot at. Was it something you did that brought this on? Or was it simply a gang related shooting? What if one of your loved ones got hit by a bullets? Think of your actions and how they may effect the ones you love.

Working For A Pay Check

My best day was when I went to go apply for a job. Luckily, my uncle called me and gave me a job at his bakery. My position in there was cashier, to unpack merchandise, and to sweep up the whole place. The best part of the job was getting paid, so I can buy myself new clothes and help my mom pay the bills. What made me proud of what I did is that I gave my mom my first paycheck, and she was so proud of me. She wanted to hug me so bad, but I was at work, working for more money.

-Chris

From The Beat: We seldom get to read pieces about earning money the old-fashioned way, by working for it. How did this experience help you think about the direction you want to go in after you leave here?

What made me proud of what I did is that I gave my mom my first paycheck, and she was so proud of me.

This Morning

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window, so I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door, opened my door, and...

Yet again, lining up for breakfast in the hall
For a portion of food that is so small

I hate having to line up and wait
To get served my meal at such a slow rate
Being told when to walk, eat, talk, and sit
After six months, I'm tired of this shhh

The same phony-ass food every day of the week
This isn't me whining, these are words of hatred I speak
Because I do, I hate it; it's so damn old
They've succeeded it, they did it... YSC has turned my heart cold

One morning, in two months, I won't have to wait
Because I'll be free September 11th with a fat plate
I'll eat what I want when I want. No one can stop or slow me down

Because I'll be free and I can wake up and eat, and not have to wait around

-Wilson

From The Beat: It must be humiliating to be treated like a baby/To be told what to do with no ifs, ands or maybe/But if you don't like it here (and who would), there are things you can do/And — more important — things you know you must eschew/The freedom that will come to you on 9-11/Is not the same thing as going to heaven/Holding onto it is the thing that counts/And that's easily forgotten when it's time to bounce/So don't go back to the usual dirt and grime/And that way you'll stay free 'til the end of time!

Startin' My Morning In Freedom

That morning, I woke up around ten. It was summertime and the sun was creepin' through my shades. My first thought was, "Got nothin' ta do, I graduated! I could sleep in, call some friends, make a good-ass breakfast, or turn on the PS3... It's all up to me." I slept in, just thinking for a minute. Then decided to get up and take a shower, gotta get fresh for the day. Got out the shower and turned on the music, four speakers connected to my special edition red 8 gig iPod, slumpin' "It's W'ateva," by The Team, some good shhh, ta start off my day. Haven't even dressed yet, still in a towel, windows rattlin' from the bass. Noddin' my head, I switch on the PS3. I don't gotta play it if I don't want to, but maybe some of my boys will.

I sit down on the couch in my room, after I open my door to my backyard, lettin' some fresh air and sun in. I pull back my black shades ta let more sun in. Now I'm ready ta get dressed... pull on some shorts and a beater. I can get dressed after, if I feel like it. The Team stops slappin', an' now it's "Back To My Mission," by Mac Dre himself, pick up "The Ghetto," 'cause I feel like kickin it wit' my boys. The phone rings. My homeboy picks up, and my day begins...

I wrote this because it's my favorite way to start off my day, doin' whatever the hell I feel like doin'. It might change from morning to morning, but who cares? It's whatever I wanna do. I got the choice — sleep in, get up, eat when I want, listen ta what I want, whenever I want. I say all that, 'cause I can't do that in here. This ain't me. I ain't got no choices. When I'm out, I'ma make sure I stay out by makin' sure I don't do the things that get me landed back here, 'cause what I'm doin' now isn't what I want ta be doin', an' that ain't me.

-Thomas

From The Beat: We appreciate how you express yourself in freedom — having so many possibilities to choose from, and varying your choices as you feel them. This place is designed to strip you of most of those choices, making you a dependent child having to ask to use the bathroom! We also appreciate the determination you express to make this your last lock-up. How hard will it be for you to stop doing whatever it was that brought you here?

livin' The Fast Life

Livin' the fast life
Yeah, the fast life get you this, that, for so long
Livin' the fast life
You always have to look over ya back
See what's about to happen
Even if it's nothing
Livin' the fast life
Makes you more prone to get into the system
Livin' the fast life
That used to be me out there
Doing the bad thing in my city
Livin' the fast life
Will get you life or dead
Like my older folks
Rest in Peace, my ninja
Much love to Lil' D
Think of you
Day after day

-K

From The Beat: What we like most about this poem is the line: "That used to be me out there." It reveals a young man with a head on his shoulders who is using his brain to make a better future. What you have revealed here is that living the fast life all too often slows you down!

Being a criminal is a gamble, and for some, they think the odds are on their side, but let me tell you something: the odds always lay with the house, and that house is the law.

Pros And Cons Of Being A Criminal

When someone is a criminal, the normal rules of waiting and working hard for something do not apply. Criminals get what they want when they want it, and without a care, get it by any means necessary. Criminals have only to fear the law and possibly other criminals, whereas the working class has the law over them and they are the prey for the criminals.

Being a criminal definitely has its cons... They have to live their lives in constant fear on being caught. They have to always look over their shoulders, and it's just a matter of time before they become a victim — a victim of the law or of another criminal.

Losing freedom is a con that far outweighs any pros that being a criminal can offer. Being a criminal is a gamble, and for some, they think the odds are on their side, but let me tell you something: the odds always lay with the house, and that house is the law. Sure, people get lucky and get over, but look at how many get over, and how many end up with three hots and a cot.

-Ca

From The Beat: What an excellent piece of reasoning and of writing, CA. You are looking at things from a mature perspective that we don't often find in The Beat. One of the drawbacks about being a child is that children seldom think that consequences ever apply to them, even when they can see how others are affected. Each child thinks he (or she) will be the one to beat the odds. Tragically, as you point out, sooner or later they end up in one of the cells 'The House' has built for them. Keep thinking; keep writing; keep teaching!

In Da Streets...

In da streets where I am from
I see a lot of things that should not go on
In da streets where I come from
Things go down, but who's to judge? Not me
In da streets where I am from
Police don't care — they let us kill off each other
In da streets where I come from
There is a store that has whatever that you need
In da streets where I come from
Fast cars, money,
and girl does that ever stop at all (???)
In da streets where I come from
You have to be known or at least heard of
'Cause you can't just go walkin' around
That's not always a good choice
In da streets I call my 'hood
Yeah, it's where I came from
But that's not how I want the world to judge me
'Cause then you have that negative view
That is not really there
And that's when it comes out
When that's all you see
So keep it real
In my streets, in my 'hood

-K

From The Beat: It sounds very difficult to make your way through these streets without getting caught up. Do you ever daydream about living in a different kind of neighborhood where you don't have to worry about going out for a walk? Are you preparing yourself (educating yourself) to give yourself the skills and ability to change your environment and your life?

Unfair Decision

Right now I'm locked up for a mistake I committed. I'm not worried about being locked up, but right now they're tryna to send me to camp. I don't think this is fair, because I've been trying my best to do good. I also don't think it's fair, because I have never been in trouble with this PO but this one time, and all of a sudden, she wants me to go to camp.

Right now I don't know for sure what they are goin' to do with me, because this isn't my county. I will have to wait to go to court to see if they will transfer me to Alameda County. But anyway, I don't think it's fair, because she haven't even gave me one chance yet, but yet she's tryin' to send me to camp.

I haven't been in trouble since 2005. That's almost two years of not getting into trouble. I think I deserve at least one chance to show her I can get myself together and make better decisions. Like I said, I'm not worried about doing time in hall, but I think camp is too harsh of a punishment for me. At least they can sit me in here for a couple of months and make me think about what I did. I've been working so hard on the outs to graduate out of high school, and if they do send me to camp, all my plans are goin' to be gone. I really want my high school diploma instead of a GED, but whatever I have to do to get back home, that's what I'm goin' to do. But hopefully, she do give me a chance.

-The Kid

From The Beat: It sounds like you're doing what you should be doing to get yourself out of the system and back on the road to a better future. We don't know how you messed up this time, but when you think about what you did to lose so much, how do you think you could have avoided this consequence? What can you tell your PO about your determination not to mess up again? If you get the chance you're hoping for, what specific changes do you plan to make not just to show your PO that you're a responsible young man, but to show yourself that you can live in freedom without risking all that your own actions caused you to give up? We hope your PO lets you go back to school, and we hope you get your diploma and keep doing the right thing!

*In da streets I
call my 'hood
Yeah, it's where I
came from
But that's not
how I want the
world to judge me
'Cause then you
have that
negative view*

All Flamed Up

When I wake up
I gots ta get a swisha
So I can roll it up
Always burnin' a dub
And grapes is w'at I love
I like to get high
So I can start my day off
Drink and get messed up
Then kick it wit' da homies
All flamed up
When I'm on da streets
I gotta watch out
'Cause I don't know
When I go down
But for right now
I gots ta watch out

-Pulga

From The Beat: There's a critical link between how you like to start your day and how you need to end your day. Even though you say you have to "watch out," instead you choose to keep your mind foggy. That may be why you're here.

Magic Plant

Your family fights and you're living on welfare
School seems worthless and life's not fair
You go through too much every day
So light this joint and smoke your troubles away
If you always stressed or in a hurry
Just take a few hits and you'll have no worry
No matter what kinda problems are in your world
Someone wants you dead, or you broke up with your girl
Have no fear, 'cause worry you can't
Just as long as you have the magic plant

-Slim Shaney

From The Beat: The problem with your "prescription," doctor, is that sometimes the medicine can become the disease. If you blot out every problem with "the magic plant," then everything becomes your problem — another reason to "smoke your troubles away." How are you handling the problems you certainly have in here without resorting to smoking?

This Morning

I got up, went outside, didn't think I was goin' to get high. I thought I wasn't goin' to smoke again. I thought that four months was goin' to change my life, but it didn't. I just had to hit that blunt.

-Calhoun

From The Beat: Well, of course you didn't HAVE TO hit anything. And if you did, you're facing an even more serious situation. No, you WANT to smoke so you smoke. There are consequences, however, some experience right away (both good and bad), but others you can't really know until they materialize many years later.

Doing It Live... And Getting Caught

I remember one day when the homie came to my house in the morning and woke me up. He was with his pit and I told him to wait for me, 'cause I had to take a shower and get ready to cut out to go burn it, and at night, we did it live. And the next day I got caught up by the cops and I got locked up. But that day was a cool-ass day and a bad day.

-Dumbo

From The Beat: Come on Dumbo, you've been writing for The Beat long enough to know that this is very short and without any of the details that would make it a decent piece. What did you do that caused you to get picked up the next day by the cops? Is it worth it when you keep giving significant portions of your life over to this system to tell you what to do and when to do it?

I thought that four months was goin' to change my life, but it didn't.

The Rules Of The Street

Nowadays, people don't know how to stay true to the game. I feel like if you wanna be in the street life, then you gotta stick to the rules. The main rules of the streets is stick with yo' squad, don't snitch, and be real, always.

But when you break any of the rules, then you don't have anything else to prove, because if you can't live it, then you can't be with it, because it's not you. If you can't take a case or gain respect, then you belong in the house, going to school.

-Phil

From The Beat: We've read this notion before that only a certain kind of person is suited to the game, and there is a childish belief that those are the real people, the strong people, the people with courage. The reason we find this childish is that at a certain point (we hope sooner than later), you will look back on you decision not to go to school but to hit the block instead, and wish that you had done the truly courageous thing, and that is to be different from your homies and commit yourself to your own better future. We know you don't believe this right now, but we've been around too long not to recognize the regret that always comes from not having gone to school.

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my cellblock window, so I slowly got up, brushed my teeth and hair, then got dressed.

This Morning

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my cellblock window, so I slowly got up, brushed my teeth and hair, then got dressed. I went to the front door. They opened it and me and my cellmate stood in front of our cell. Then we all lined up to go to the cafeteria for breakfast. Then we went back to our cell. After we ate, I slept for an hour. Then we went to school.

-Chris

From The Beat: You know, Chris, as routine as this seems to you, for us (your readers), it opens the door a crack to let us look in. What would make it so much better is if you filled in the spaces — what did you have for breakfast? Is it always the same? Who makes and serves it? What time did school start? What did you study? What was good and what was bad about it? What did you do after school? What else do you do to keep yourself busy and focused? Asking yourself those questions and then sharing your answers is what will turn ordinary writing into first-class writing.

RIP, Dyno

Dyno is my cousin. He was nineteen years old. He is my favorite cousin because he showed me a lot. But something happened to him; he got a tumor in his leg. From that tumor, he got cancer. He was in the hospital for four months.

One night, January 2, 2007, at 4:30 a.m., my mom got a phone call. When she received the phone call, they told her that my cousin was dead. I will never forget my cousin, Dyno. Now I realize life ain't forever.

-Meza

From The Beat: We're so sorry to read about your loss, Meza. After reading so many pieces about violent gun deaths, it is important to be reminded that death always leaves loved ones behind to grieve, whether that death came naturally (as Dyno's did), or not.

I'm just mad I'm here.

The Advantages Of Being In A Gang

There is no advantages. The advantages is you can die faster.

The advantages of being a criminal is you can come up on money and accessories. The disadvantage is jail and your life. If you slip, then it's bad. And if you gonna be a criminal, make sure you take for the right reason.

-Keoki

From The Beat: Well, it seems that the disadvantages are the same for the gangbanger and the criminal. If there are no advantages to being in a gang, why do so many young people choose to jump in?

Dreaming

Dreaming I could get out
 Dreaming to be by your side
 Dreaming that I could fall in a deep sleep and never wake up
 But that's the only thing I could do in this cold cell
 Wishing that you never let go
 Wishing to have my freedom
 Wishing to turn back the hands of time
 And never had to do the crime
 And the time
 So we could still be together
 But opening my eyes
 Realizing it's only a dream
 Getting sad because you're not here with me
 I need to move on with my life
 And keep my head up, like a G
 But I just need to try
 Dedicated to the lady of my dreams

-D

From The Beat: Wishing is something we all do, but it is not enough to make our wishes come true. For that to happen, we have to have a real plan, something with a beginning, middle and end. None of us can turn back the hands of time, but all of us can make decisions that affect our future. So, if you wish you had never done the crime that brought you here, turn that wish into a promise never to act in the same way in the future, and that way you can avoid the same consequences.

This Morning...

This morning I woke up and I was so nervous! I had court today and it didn't go as I expected. It went okay... didn't get screamed at or applauded for good behavior. I kinda expected more out of it, but it didn't happen.

I'm waiting now to see if I got accepted to a rehab in Santa Cruz. Second to that might be LA and three places I don't feel I'll do good in, but I'm gonna do it. Well, thanks for the space to throw this in here. Just a lil' that's on my mind. Ten toes down and a chin up. 'Til next time.

-Giggles

From The Beat: You could fill this piece out with some more details, Giggles. For example, why don't you explain why you feel that some of the placements are better for you than others?

This Morning

When I got up this morning, I worked out on my unit and. It was cool, but I wish I was home. Every day I just think about life, like what I'm going to do, what I'm going to be. When I get out this time, I'm not coming back. This is the last time, but I'm just mad I'm here.

-Jerome

From The Beat: The way to make this a much better piece of writing is to include details. For example, when you think about what you're going to do the next time you're free (to keep the promise of never coming back), what are you thinking about? What is your plan for change? What will you stop doing? What will you start doing? If you're mad that you're here, who are you mad at?

*I couldn't open my door.
 Someone had to open
 it for me. It wasn't
 that beautiful as
 last morning.*

Last Morning And This Morning

Last morning I woke up, the sun beaming through my window. It seemed a beautiful day, so I woke up quick. I washed up and got dressed. I opened my door. I heard birds and saw blooming flowers. It was beautiful.

This morning I woke up, or, actually, someone woke me up. I washed up and everything, but this time I couldn't open my door. Someone had to open it for me. It wasn't that beautiful as last morning. I rather wake up in the last morning again.

-Meza

From The Beat: There is something very special about waking up in your own bed and opening your own door — especially after losing the right to do that! When you say you'd rather wake up in your own bed, we hope the desire to do that outweighs the desire to do whatever it is that has caused you to hand your freedom over to the system.

Do What A Grown Mans Do

I been locked up fa a while now
 In these months, flyin' by
 It's a messed up game
 When dey debatin' on you' life
 You got da attorney tryna help you
 But da DA goin' against you
 You got yo' peoples on the outs
 An' you know they all miss you
 You got cho life in they hands
 An' they gone do what they want to
 You need ta stop actin' like a kid
 An' do what grown mans do

-Unknown Yadigg

From The Beat: Did you mean to write, "You got cho life in they hands?" Because that's exactly right. You put your life in their hands, and it's up to you to take back control of your life. We agree that you need to "stop actin' like a kid," and step into responsible maturity, but can you give us some examples of what that means, exactly?

Days

Every day that's gone by has made me to be the person that I am today, and it has made me a better person. Even though I have got a lot of charges, that's not stoppin' me from makin' myself a better person. Days to me have turned into months, and then my days have turned into years.

Me, my life is right now going to CYA, but that's not scaring me at all. The main thing that's be on my mind is my family and friends. I know that some people say that I am guilty, but I am not, at least of this crime.

-K

From The Beat: We're not saying you should be scared of CYA, but we think you should give it serious consideration, because whether you're scared or not, your heading into a cold system that it takes personal courage to escape from (the courage of personal change). Can you tell us which is easier: to do time when you're guilty as charged or to do time when you're innocent of the charges? Explain your answer.

*I am always tryin' to stay
 alive, but sometimes I put
 myself in the range of fire.
 See, me growin' up in da game
 was not my full choice, but
 it's stuck to me like glue.*

My Summer Vacation

-Alan

From The Beat: We're not printing what you wrote, Alan. It offers the readers nothing more than a pep-talk for getting drunk and high (as if those choices don't come with consequences), and an unnecessary and violent brawl with "rivals" that you want to use our pages to disrespect. Use The Beat to teach something.

It Could Have Been Me

It could have been me
 When they announced another teenager shot
 It could have been me
 Tryin' to fight for things that don't belong to me
 It could have been me
 Facing prison for my color of my skin
 Over somethin' that the next man did
 But not manning up
 It could have been me
 Gettin' played by a girl and not findin' out in time
 It could have been me
 Fighting to show that I am not the one to mess with
 At any given time
 When you think he's a punk
 Just think all these things happened to me or my
 friends
 And at any given time
 It can come you' way
 To take you' life or help it
 So just think
 It could have been me

-K

From The Beat: When you start thinking about all the things that could have happened to you (and still could happen), how does it make you want to change, if at all? What can you do to minimize the chances of negative things happening to you, especially those that cannot be undone?

My School Day

I woke up this morning, the sun beaming through my bedroom window, so I quickly got up, washed and dressed, went to the front door. I looked to see what was happening. I saw people serving the food, so I was ready to go and eat. Then I went back to my room, and was waiting to come to school.

When I came to school, I went to PE first. Second, I went to Science, and last I went to Math. After that, I went back to my unit and we ate. Last, I went to my room and looked out through the window, and then I went to my bed and rested.

-Arturo

From The Beat: Thank you for going through your entire day for us, Arturo. We wish you had included more details, though, like what you're studying in those classes, what you like the most (and the least), and whether doing these things every day makes you want to change how you live.

Tryin' To Stay Alive

I am always tryin' to stay alive, but sometimes I put myself in the range of fire. See, me growin' up in da game was not my full choice, but it's stuck to me like glue. People say that I should give it up. Try to give up somethin' that you have been doin' for a long time.

It's me; I am in it to live it. The game has took some fam bam away from me. Even it tried to take me, but I made it out alive, but I can't turn my back on it at all, and that's my choice.

-Boss Hog

From The Beat: The problem with making the "choice" you've made (even acknowledging that it wasn't entirely your choice) is that some consequences are permanent. We hate that you are doing things that could so easily end with you taking or losing a life, and the real tragedy is that if comes to that (or to your ending up in a wheelchair or in a prison), then all of your "if only" and "I wish" regrets will be too late.

Them Days

As the days passed, I remembered when I was a lil' kid. I was only twelve years old. I remember back in the days I was wid' my dad. We used to go to the park and have BBQ and go swimming, and we used to do hella stuff together. My dad ended up passing away when I was twelve years old, and since then, I never been the same. I started gangbanging when he passed away, and if he was still around, things will be different.

-Lil' R

From The Beat: We think you're right about if your dad were here to guide and support you, things would be different. But now you have to be the man. You have to be father to yourself, a stand-in for what you know he would tell you about the choices you've been making, and the choices he wants you to make.

Pros And Cons Of Being In A Gang

The good part about being in a gang is you're never alone, inside or out. You always have someone to depend on for anything you want. You always have someone to help with your decisions on the street. No one ever leaves you behind.

The bad part is that your love grows for a different family than the one you have. You will always be looked at like a certain individual in a group of different people, other than yo' homies. You put tears and sorrow in your real family, that will always be there, even though you...

In the end, you have to depend on whoever is left, if they're not in jail or dead. Friends are for chums. Love and respect to the ones that are left in my life to depend on.

-Smokey

From The Beat: It's a tough decision to make that leaves your real family in tears, always stressing about whether your free or not, whether your alive or not. It's interesting that you began a sentence with the words, "In the end..." and completed that sentence with the words, "...in jail or dead."

I found out my mom and dad weren't my real parents, so I started hanging around a school called "Fair Oaks," and every single person I hung with were older, but showed me respect. So I started putting in work to show that I was down to do anything.

In My Gang I Get Respect

The advantage of being in a gang is that homies always show respect and show love for each other. When I was eleven, I found out my mom and dad weren't my real parents, so I started hanging around a school called "Fair Oaks," and every single person I hung with were older, but showed me respect. So I started putting in work to show that I was down to do anything. When I was just into my teens, I got arrested for fighting, so I got locked up, and this is the only bad thing about gangs. So now I've been in the system for two years, but I will never stop putting down for mine.

-Nianiak

From The Beat: Basically, you've allowed yourself to be a slave of a cold system, and then you've described that slavery as "the only bad thing" about your lifestyle. That makes it sound like giving up your freedom is a small thing. We promise you, as you get older and the time you have to lose to the system grows ever longer, you won't find it such a minor inconvenience. In fact, we are willing to be money that your decision to "never stop putting it down" will change over time. We only hope the change happens while you can still do something about it.

... go back in the room at 8, chill for a while, 'til the lights go out and go to sleep. We do this every day in here.

The Best Day

The best day was when I was at Disneyland for my birthday and we stayed there for a month. We had hella good times there. The best day was being with my family at Universal Studio when we were together. I had a good-ass time when I was there. Even though my parents took me there for my birthday, I still got some money from them, even though they took me there.

The other best day was when me and my homeboys were giggin' at Disneyland and we made a video there. It was hella cracking when we did it, because we had a good-ass time giggin'.

-Phyzz

From The Beat: How long ago did you have these experiences at Disneyland and Universal Studio? Do you still have a copy of the video you made giggin' with your homeboys?

Same Ol' Thing, Just A Different Day

Every day is the same ol' thang — wake up in the morning and get ready to go to Central Dining to eat breakfast, come back to the unit, and wait to go to school, stay at school 'til 12:00, so we could go to Central Dining to eat lunch. Go back to the unit for a while, and go back to school 'til three, get out of school, go back to the unit, get ready for LMA. After LMA, get ready for showers, chill in the room 'til five, and go eat dinner at Central Dining. Go back to the unit and stay in the room 'til seven for program, go back in the room at 8, chill for a while, 'til the lights go out and go to sleep. We do this every day in here.

-Same Routine

From The Beat: Just making a list of daily activities doesn't tell us much about what those activities are like. For example, what do you eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner? What do you study at school, and what do you like (and dislike) about it? What do you do in your room? How do you choose to spend your free time? What do you like to read? Etc.

Black Angel

(Prologue)

Surrounded by Pharisee's one can only stifle the pessimistic stigma. Once the human mind is filled to capacity with another's perstilent beliefs, it will engage in self-preservation, or collapse within and succumb to consensus. The mind is complex, but compulsion is not. However perspicuous the motive of the phalanx may be, it is inevitable that your conscience will persuade you to participate in their perfidies; fearing rejection the predator in man is evident as justification is spoken in tongues of pragmatism....

The chill of the midnight air ambushed me immediately as the doors to freedom parted. The initial shock gave me goose bumps and involuntarily as the doors caused me to backpedal. The driver of the Greyhound bus asserted his authority by reminding me that it was him doing me the favor by stopping over a mile short of his final destination. I thought nothing of it since I was the sole passenger on the bus and we were at a deserted intersection waiting for the light to change. I had been in desperate need of human contact to help me elude my conscience. It was the third day since I had left home. By now I knew my mom was sick from worrying, I was trying not to take into consideration her despair. Instead I found myself replacing grief and guilt with punishment. I shoplifted, panhandled, and hitch hiked until I 'found' means to travel and eat at will. "Get off or sit down!" he demands. The booming sound of the driver's voice and the hissing sound of the door closing brought me back to reality. Much obliged to exit bare footed and all, I leapt down to the pavement and turned back to defile his mother's reputation in a show of gratitude. The first few steps I took with pride, showering myself with compliments for completing the 500 mile journey by myself with 48 dollars to my name. I slept in bushes, creeks, abandoned houses; the first night I lay awake contemplating whether or not to go back home. My pride refused to let me...

As my feet adapted to the frozen coarse texture of the asphalt, I suddenly realized that it was not just the exhaust from the bus concealing the taillights as they disappeared deep into the night; it was raining! So much that in the midnight silence the drops sounded like marbles being cast from the heavens atop the pavement. I sought and found shelter in a phone booth next to a run down motel. The backdrop of midnight magnified the flickering neon light of the vacancy sign. I could almost smell the cheap scent of the infamous Harlots as they covertly employed themselves under the cover of night. As I dried my feet and toes with yellow pages from the phone book, I found myself desiring "Company." I waited and waited, less than patient, my mood turned sour as I let my pride subside and accept the fact that I wasn't going to be propositioned. I called my cousin, I could barely contain myself anticipating the welcoming of my arrival. On the seventh ring I heard my grandma pick up. Diabetes had stolen my aunt's life before I was born. My father has it bad, but my grandma was experiencing the worst of it, deteriorating rapidly. She placed the receiver to her mouth, her labored breathing muffled her words. My heart sank as I knew she was home alone as usual, knowing not if anyone was home with her. She was in the process of dying a horrible death.

I placed the phone in its cradle, sincerely guilt ridden. I retraced my steps through puddles. Since my departure from the bus, my trek was becoming more and more arduous. As I took a moment to survey my surroundings, the rain assaulted me. Low on funds, I contemplated robbing one of the hoes stalking the street corners and every patron that happened by. My pride distorted my reasoning, I kept telling myself it was my street instinct beckoning when I was waiting to be propositioned. I conjured images in my mind of me lurking in the darkness, waiting to pounce on my prey. Deep down I knew I longed for company, even if it came in the form of physical gratification. The methodic sound of waves breaking in the distance drew

If you're into epic stories, then you should definitely take a glance at this next writer, DJ Hamel, or his most recent pen name, Gemz. This week, he hits us with a very inspiring tale about how one person not only changed his judgments about a whole group of people, but also how that person saved his life. From beginning to end, this story grabbed and kept our attention throughout. It's filled with entertainment and emotion as he puts us front row in a very revealing period in his life. The story encompasses everything from befriending a dog that ran away to drug deals and gang tension, but throughout the story you could tell that the narrator (him) has a very compassionate heart. His starving belly humbles his stereotypes about a particular group when a woman offers him and not his dog food. And his relationship with her flourishes from there. And though there's a tragic ending, it didn't seem so tragic to us objectively because her good natured way of being is still with him to this day. He wouldn't be able to write so vividly about it if it wasn't. These are one of those pieces that reinforce why we have a Beat Without section and that's simply because we want to teach through our experiences, no matter how positive or negative they are. You've taught us a lot thus far and we have a feeling there's much more to come... He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA.

me closer to the beach. My initial plan was to walk the streets all night, staying close to minority infested areas; knowing the feds would only be looking for the truly heinous, and bypass a raggedy runaway. I traveled down the beach for what seemed like miles until I came in view of the pier. I knew there would be transients, their homes unknown, their whereabouts scattered like litter. I kept my distance, burrowing myself into the sand, embracing the blanket of sleep consuming me, awaiting fire in the sky...

The morning dew of the sea was thick and brackish, I awoke to an overly friendly yellow lab tasting my face. I struggled to grasp reality, I freed myself from the dog and proceeded on to the pier with the beast in tow. After fraternizing with the local fisherman and inquiring about their luck, I found myself seated in front of a palm readers shop. Ironic, I thought. I had spent everyday and moment wondering what the future held for me. I knew I had to get to a phone. I spotted someone with a cell phone and stood to pursue them, the beast darted from under the bench causing me to stumble and brace myself on its back inciting it into a frenzy thinking I was playing with it. The dog went berserk. I corralled it into a corner and attempted to apprehend it. Once successful, I found that she had I.D. tags. Her name was "Sally." She resided over 2 miles from where we stood. I began wondering aloud if she too was running from an overbearing tyrant as well. She cocked her head to the side and transformed her face into a puzzled mask. I began the rest of the day trying to get a hold of my cousin. He was out of town visiting our other cousins. I felt deflated he wasn't expected to return for a week. I feared the atrocities that the streets evoked from me...

The perturbed and homeless were thick in this area. Their crumpled, drunken figures deep in slumber seemed familiar, as if they hadn't budged since I left last. With a particular street affiliation forbidden in this area, under the paralyzing sun I searched for cover from the heat from my enemies. In a hypnotic canter I danced from shadow to shadow, anticipating the ranks of my opposition being out in full force. I came to a point where I would have to surrender my cover and divulge my location. I anticipated confrontations, my actions would be drastic... I sacrificed the well being of Sally by tossing a stick into their circle to provide diversion. I sprinted the distance like a gazelle across the sun-baked canvas of the Serengeti. I heard a stampede of footfall behind me. The war had been ongoing for as long as I can remember. Our method of operation ignited it to new levels. Our quarry's dealt with on sight! I hit the fence in stride, conquering it in one bound. Sensing the alarm, Sally stood at the fence digging frantically, whimpering. I glanced and saw her eyes through the slits of the fence. She matched me stride for stride. I lost my footing and cart-wheeled down a steep embankment. Later I awoke, or regained consciousness, every inch of my body ached. Still in hostile territory, I knew I had to move...

The sun had set, the remains of daylight painted in a vast expanse of beauty. The burnt orange clouds were the only trace

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of day as nature birthed night. I embraced the darkness that was on the verge of bestowing us. As a child, I feared the dark, now as a nocturnal creature, I fear the light. Maneuvering through backfields, the hike was void of stealth. Sally unintentionally (or not) set off every four-legged alarm system in a 1 mile radius. I chastised myself for letting her accompany me. I couldn't ditch her, every time I tried to vanish, I'd round a corner to find her waiting. We finally arrived at an opening that would lead to my destination. I was filthy, and had abandoned my belongings during the escape. The remnants of my possessions fit in my front pockets with room to spare. I counted six dollars, 2 sticks of gum, and a miniature sand box in my pocket. I was famished, wanting nothing more than to "drop everything" and sleep. I ventured out in the shadows cautiously to discover Sally across the street using her charm and lack of discipline to swindle the patio diners out of treats. All at once I saw the divide of two different worlds. Here I sat in a vacant lot atop a stray cinder block surrounded by weeds, decaying brambles, broken bottles, and unadulterated poverty. I can imagine the hunger pains children would experience between government assistance checks, (welfare) as the mouthwatering aromas from across the street cruelly taunted them. I was familiar with this war of life. Our projects were racially integrated, but we were taught to stick to our own kind, "don't let the Black kids ride your bikes," or "make sure the Mexicans give you your basketball back!" The words ring fresh in my ears still. Those twisted values were embedded in my soul. I struggled with myself to relinquish their beliefs...

The clock read 11 o'clock to the other world close by. The flawless terracotta glistened from the steam cleaner. The rest of the landscape was decorated in carnations for as far as the eye could see. People were exiting, disappearing, returning to the safety of their guarded lives. The only sounds to be heard were sirens in the distance bellowing its promise of hope, or on my side of the tracks where sirens mean they're coming to haul off someone for love... Another man preyed upon what I suspected. Sally's growling brought me back to the moment, I was frozen at first assuming we had been found. I searched frantically for a weapon. Then I heard that distinct sound of someone trying to get your attention secretly, "Pssst" from across the street in the shadows of the pizza parlor and the rest of the outside mall I caught movement in my peripheral vision. I knew at first glance it was a woman, buxom I observed, as I approached her my nerves calmed. I drew nearer and saw that she adorned the parlor ensemble. Once I saw that she was Black I commenced to finding an excuse to make our contact brief. Most of the Blacks we were at war with, I grew up with. Nevertheless the seed of hatred had been planted and already blossomed. Had it not been for racial politics and turf wars I'd still be running around partaking in all sorts of mischief with them. The worst of it is that we categorized Blacks as one, when really we had issues with only one faction. The others swore allegiance to us... But war is war and everyone operates under their own agenda. A child's innocence is revoked once evil is instilled.

As I drew closer I saw that her name tag reads "Ruby." Her almond shaped eyes were magnetic, I couldn't help but stare. I don't know if it was the understanding I saw in them, or just the fact that I hadn't been that close to a Black woman, ever. Not a stranger anyways. She closed the remainder of the distance in one movement. I felt my personal space evaporate, I took two steps back. She thrust the small pizza box into my chest, not hard but assertively. She spoke "I saw you squattin' over in that lot all night you ain't moved a muscle 'till now! Are you runnin' from the law or sumthin'?" — "Something like that," I responded. She continued: "Well there's some leftovers in that box. Don't feed it all to that beggin' monsta!" — "Sally," I said. "I don't give a damn!" She blurted, catching me off guard. "You eat that and come back if you need." She gave me a brief summary of her work schedule. I watched her hips sway as she returned to the parlor. I thought, "Something familiar about

that walk..."

The next few days arrived and departed in a flurry of confusion and disappointment. I detected Sally's familiarity with certain places we visited. I felt compelled to return her. As we approached her home I sensed a note of hesitation on her part. Almost as if she didn't want to go home. All of that ceased as a little girl came bounding around the house, pigtails swinging back and forth across her face. Sally charged her in sheer gratitude of being home. The father, I presumed, saw me and motioned for the girl to return to him as if I posed some sort of threat. She ignored his commands, elated to be reunited with Sally. Once his mind registered how Sally must've got home, he spoke to me in broken sentences as if to accommodate me if I didn't understand English. When I spoke I saw surprise flash across his face, maybe embarrassment. "I found her at the beach, next time she runs you should check there," I advised. He moved to offer me his hand in appreciation, or more out of obligation. I looked down at my own hands and was disgusted. I was filthy. I saw my reflection in a car window, I looked cadaverous; from malnutrition, a lack of sleep, and stress. "...Been gone for a little over a week." His voice startled me, I didn't even respond. I was trying to let the wave of anger wash over me. Being subjected to the same racism I practiced infuriated me. Being a half-breed of Hawaiian and Native American descent, I was often mistaken for Mexican or a light skinned Black from a distance. Whatever he assumed me to be, I was offended, instead of lashing out I let the tides of fury grow calm. As I turned to leave he offered me a reward for returning her. I felt that my silence was answer enough. Any further contact with him would be flirting with disaster. I elected to pursue the plans I made earlier in hopes of defying the hands of time until my cousins return. Ever so slowly, the rituals had begun....

Concealed by the embrasure of my temporary shelter, I watched as the creatures of the night scurried by unknowingly, their prey content with the deplorable conditions of poverty... Grateful to escape nature's wrath I began to devise the makings of a cruise schematic or survival in my mind. Content with the groundwork, I let my mind drift as I stood hypnotized by the embers fleeing the fire into the night; only to be abducted by monsoon caliber winds, snuffing out the life of them before the bonfire, tossing in the occasional twig. Impatient I began to pace in order to soothe the butterflies trapped in the pit of my stomach. Better that, I thought to myself, than to be hungry. I had been holed up on the wrong side of town for three days now. I knew not one person with whom I shared refuge in this house with. It had been a week since my first encounter with Ruby Just the thought of her made my stomach twist into knots with hunger pains. So much for the butterflies. At that point, I could no longer wait for my cousin to get home, it was time to move....

The clock struck 10:58 as I did the shadow dance. The brave and proud would call it cowardice, but those of us who've been out of bounds or crossed enemy lines know that one wrong move could bring you to the face of catastrophe. (I operate accordingly.) It was late, but on the weekends the streets are full. Any other time I'd be trying to pop at some unknowing tender hoping to pull off a hook up. On this night I only wanted to hook up with some food. Not that I wasn't in position to step into the pool of minglers. Earlier I had run into an old friend and was given some hop (Heroin) to dump for him. Instead I seized the opportunity to do as I pleased and acquire a few necessities. I started off by cutting it, doubling the amount, but cutting the quality in half. Desperate times call for desperate measures. I made a beeline to a known drug area and traded for crack. The clientele is different, worse to me, but the dope has more control over them. I ran into a legendary smoker named "Jada." She would do anything for a hit. Anything... We took the twenty-five dollar shuttle up the street, she might've been under the impression that we were going to have physical relations.

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Soon after we arrived at the mall and I ushered her inside, she knew she would be boosting (stealing) if she wanted to smoke. I gave her my sizes, color/brand preference, and placed my order. The 20 dollar boulder was good incentive. Content, I left the mall in search of a small piece (gun) — anytime you get approached by a buyer for a gun, street ethics forbid you from keeping their identities a secret. Nobody wants to sell the gun that gets a loved one smoked... I settled for a .25 — it was small but effective up close. I continued along backstreets, the familiar weight of a gun in my waistband made my stomach relax. I cut through the outside mall and down a utility alley to find Ruby and a shadowy figure in the midst of a heated conversation. I caught a glimpse of her facial expression and knew it was more than a lover's quarrel going down. I moved to exit, not wanting to step on the next man's toes in the commission of a lik. My conscience brought me back. I spoke to Ruby as if I worked with her: "The boss wants you back, the cops brought your son in." — I stood there as if nothing were out of the ordinary. She bolted past him, then me. I followed her to a well-lit area feeling like prey. Subconsciously I resettled down to stroke the steel beneath my shirt. She thanked me, then asked me to walk with her home, insisting I spend the night. I accepted. We started off on a familiar journey. I used to walk this identical stretch to and from school. There was no doubt in my mind that we were headed towards the Westside. I felt comfortable being familiar with every in and out.

As we approached the bridge that stretches over the freeway I was almost smiling. When in good graces with my father, we lived right at the bottom of the bridge. We traveled deeper into my comfort zone, I saw old faces, waved at people I knew, but ducked when I saw homies. I wasn't ready to jump back into that lifestyle then... Behind "Foodland" we arrived at her apartment. I heard voices, booming, voices. Gambling voices. A crap game. The air was thick with smoke. The voices ceased to exist as the attention turned to me. Dread consumed me. I walked into a house of nightmares. 10,11,12 — the amount of hatred their eyes generated was breathtaking. Everyone of them had on the attire identifying them as the enemy. I recognized several, I even knew some from before the feud. Ruby sensed the tension and quickly intervened. "Dayvon, Have your friends leave, now!" Nothing's worse than getting jawed at in front of homies, except getting whooped in front of them! He complied. He and I were cordial, we used to bum quarters to play video games at the Laundromat. We exchanged awkward greetings. They went to the room and returned with bedding for me. He had a different air about him, she must've told him about the alley. I told her I would be leaving and therefore wouldn't need the blankets. She tried to change my mind but knew it was futile. She whispered something to him before the door closed behind us. I heard voices close by and reached for the gun. Ruby watched from the window as we passed the wolf pack. The taunting and jeers would stop here, for as soon as I step into the streets, it would take one yell in island slang and my own pack would be en route in moments. They were out of bounds now... As Dayvon and I stepped away, he gave me a pager, two hundred dollars and more dope. He asked if I belonged to the "other team." I nodded, but he already knew. Silently I disappeared into the night, wondering if I'd ever see Ruby again...

The next few months passed semi-uneventful. I caught up with my cousin and started staying with my grandma. I dove back into the ranks with the homies. I saw Ruby only a handful of times. Again, I tried to avoid contact, not so much out of racism, but more out of her seeing me back in my moment after I promised her I wouldn't return to it. One night Ruby paged me and we made plans to meet. Her son had been fatally wounded down south. I felt nothing as she told me. We all know the risk you take when you're out of bounds. We sat at an all night coffee shop, the Santa Ana breeze was warm and ominous. She

wept, for her son, for herself. I found out that night that Ruby used to prostitute and was H.I.V. positive. She used to turn tricks with no protection. Despite years of drug abuse, she was sure she contracted it from "work..." No other family, she had me only to turn to. She confided many other things. I listened for hours. I felt love for Ruby. Not a pitiful love either, genuine... I carried on, making plans to move down south with my uncle. Two weeks before I was to leave, a month after I saw Ruby last that night, I fell into depression. I drank until I blacked out and ate acid like candy. I found myself on the same bridge Ruby and I crossed once together. I stood high above the freeway, outside of the security gate, my arms stretched wide like wings. I felt the night air swirling as I awaited death. I closed my eyes, at peace with my decision, I heard cars roaring beneath me at high speeds; some honking as if to say "Don't Jump!" — as I leaned forward, more and more, my heels were the remaining life of me on the bridge. I leaned further to start to fall; all at once the wind blew hard, and for a split second I was being blown back to a safer position. I heard noises but wasn't aware of another's presence until their hands were yanking at my shirt. I felt the safety fence against my back, cold, oddly serene, I stood there staring at the midnight sky and the stars far off in another world. I turned around to find Ruby clawing at my shirt over the fence in harm's way. She was hysterical, she wept silent tears. As I returned to the other side I felt guilt she dropped to her knees and hugged my legs tightly. I stood there, high, stunned. It was all surreal. She was about to have a breakdown "...Promise me you'll never die... Don't die without me... Don't leave me... I love you." Besides family, that was the first time anyone said that and I believed them.

I moved down south but returned for a court date (curfew) I only wanted to see my Grandma and Ruby. I haven't heard from her the whole time I was gone. I went to the pizza parlor but didn't find her. Her apartment was vacant. Normally I would've left, but this was Ruby. She saved me from dying. I rang the next door bell and out stepped "Stella" Ruby's play mom. Her face grew sad when she recognized me, she invited me in and told me that Ruby had been killed right after I left. She was hit by a car on her way to work. My heart sank and has never come back up for air...

The green slopes of the cemetery were groomed to perfection. Sunset had come and almost gone leaving traces of golden plated clouds to welcome nightfall. The air was thick with scents of licorice and sage blowing in off the mountaintops. As I climbed the steep hills in search of her grave, my mood was morose. The injustices of man, most of many I've contributed to, made me hate the world. I wasn't accustomed to feeling grief, but as I drew closer to her resting place, I was overwhelmed. I took a moment to gather myself, collecting my thoughts so as not to offend her with what I was preoccupied with. As daylight faded I became frantic. I walked in circles twice through the maze of headstones. All at once, the blowing of the wind, the rustling of autumn leaves doing cartwheels through the air caught my attention. Under a leaning oak tree, I saw a head stone in the shadows. I knew at once that it was Ruby. Beckoning just as she did the first time we crossed paths, from the shadows. Wet leaves obscured her entire headstone. I cleared them away one side at a time, as you would push the hair back out of a child's eyes. I ran my hands across the letters of her name, hoping to conjure something in my mind to say besides what I felt. Anger, pain, loss. Eventually I was calm, not wanting to think the thoughts I was in case she could hear them. I wondered how many people attended her funeral, probably none. Just the pastor and groundskeeper. My heart smoldered with grief and fury as I spoke it: Telling her how much of an impact she's had on my life, swearing off any further wrong doing, finally, confessing my love for her... RIP Ruby...

Last Of A Dying Breed

Sitting in a closet with my gun to my head, I tried to think of another way to erase the memory of 1983 — that was the year my mother was killed by her ex-boyfriend, I was 11 years old. My mother and I were very, very close. She was a strong woman and influence in my life, and I loved her so much that, when she was taken away, I would not let myself feel the loss. I couldn't allow myself to hurt that much: I couldn't miss her that much and still live. I thought, if I continue to feel this way its gonna kill me. That was my first symptom of post- traumatic stress disorder. Anyway, at first I continued on as if nothing had happened. I was numb. I went about my life as if Johnnyrose had never existed. If it meant saying to myself, I never had a mother, then that's what I did to survive. I was in this state of psychic numbness for 17 years, just refusing to believe what had occurred.

Then, in 1999, recollections began to intrude on my life. These thoughts occurred anywhere, anytime. If the sky looked the way it did that year and day in 1983, if the lighting in a room looked remotely similar to that of my mother's room on that particular morning, it would make me relive the moment.

I no longer had that emotional anesthesia. My mind would replay every detail of that day: I heard somebody fall in my mother's room, but when I went to see what was going on, the door was locked. Just as I finally got the door open, at first I didn't see her. Then I saw her body slumped against the wall her head hanging low. I knew that my mother was gone.

After years of numbness, I didn't know how to make the flashbacks go away. One night the scene was on constant rewind in my head. I couldn't take it. I got up, shaking all over, and went into the closet. Picking up my gun, I thought about my daughters. What were Monique and Ardrana going to do without a father? I cried out to God to please help me. When I put my finger on the trigger, there was this still voice that said, I love you Dad and I remember more than anything, I love my daughters. I woke my children's mother up and told her that I needed help. But every day I get up and thank God for waking me up and giving me strength to get through. I find reason to go on. To be continued...

I would not let myself feel the loss. I couldn't allow myself to hurt that much: I couldn't miss her that much and still live.

Mother

It seems like forever since I've seen you.
 Sometimes I can't even remember your face.
 I can't even remember the last place we were face to face.

Sometimes I wish could take your place.
 But then again, I know you are safe,
 And I have faith I will someday see your face
 And be in that heavenly place.

But then again I fear
 Because I know the devil is near,
 And he is waiting for me to lose faith,
 For I can never again see your face.

Last week we featured a great piece among many from this next writer. "Brick By Brick" was such an incredible piece that it had our whole office talking about it all week. It was incredible because it was so innocent while also being so real. Not only that, but it had a great moral to it that we're sure everyone who read grasped. But let us not get carried away (we still have to introduce this week's installment of three stellar pieces). Our hearts dropped with sadness and our heads dropped with helplessness after reading about the experience Shawn had with physically losing his mother. The image he projects onto us of the situation where he finds his mother in her room is extremely frightening. So frightening that he suppresses it within him for many years. But as all of us who have ever been through something traumatic know, the frightening images we try to suppress, end up revealing themselves in one way or another — once revealed these images are very difficult to deal with. In fact, sometimes it can drive some of us to even consider suicide — usually a permanent solution to a temporary problem. This is what happened with Shawn. However, he thought about the things he has to live for (mainly his daughters) and decided against it. We are very happy to hear that he decided to put an end to the plaguing thought of committing suicide because we can tell from his writing that he has a whole lot to offer the world. And it would've been a shame to hear about someone ending their own life prematurely. He's writing from Florida State Prison in Raiford, Florida. We suggest you get used to his name because we have a feeling there are many more great ideas to come from him. Thank you for sharing all you have thus far, Shawn. We really appreciate it and are impatiently waiting for more...

*I have the ambition of a bull
 and the strength of a lion
 The heart of a tiger
 and the value of a diamond*

By God's Grace

As I seek the essence of a higher being that is not
 within the heavens of the sky

Rather within the nucleus of my mind
 Which is the true treasure of my life

I begin to reflect on all my past visions

And all the horrific things I've seen in prisons

From warriors die to the shrieks of a thugs cry

Young boys sodomized and grown men permanently
 traumatized

The destruction of a man's mind and the contamination
 of a boys eyes Years of systematic brutality and some
 cannot take it

Some have stood strong but the majority do not make it
 As for me! Stood strong!

For I have the ambition of a bull and the strength of a
 lion

The heart of a tiger and the value of a diamond

I sit on cloud nine, clear my mind, prophesies,

And fantasize of a place better than this

As I visualize my personalized paradise.

Always found great peace of mind by putting a pen in my
 hand Guarantee I will surpass any man

For I am the son of God yet still the son of man

And brother of Jesus yet very few understand

For I am not the average young man

And I know it, you know it and the Lord knows it

But I don't simply talk about it, I prove it, and I show it

For actions speak louder than words

And I can care less about what you've heard

For I am a man of my word and I say I'm one of the few
 brilliant men And I know one day my mind and body will
 descend

But by God's grace death is nothing but an unfortunate
 essence that the true logic of my existence shall never
 embrace!

Visitations

The rigmarole California State Prison officials subject inmates and their families and friends to, to visit one another is unusually cruel. The paper work: First, there's the Visiting Questionnaire, which must be signed and sent by the prisoner to the prospective visitor. Who then must answer a battery of personal and private questions as well as provide information regarding any criminal history. (Ex-cons and probationers may apply at their own peril!) The visitor must also sign the application under the penalty of perjury and pain of prosecution — should, heaven forbid, any information supplied therein be false. The questionnaire/application is then mailed to the Visiting Room Sergeant at the institution where the prisoner is incarcerated.

The Wait: Now begins a processing period ordinarily not less than ninety days, once the application has been received by the VRS at the CSP.

The Notification: If the application is "disapproved," the applicant is contacted by the CSP's VRS and informed of the fact. If the application is "approved," the VRS notifies the prisoner whose responsibility it now becomes to inform the visitor. (Don't ask!)

The Visit Via Appointment: Once approved, the visitor must call the prison visiting room a week in advance of the intended visit to schedule — yes, I said schedule, an appointed time. (Visiting Hours: Saturday, Sunday and holidays — of the "major" variety from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) Visitors who arrive at the prison without first having scheduled an appointment risk being turned away. Incredibly, even with having scheduled an appointment, there is still usually a one-two hour delay before the actual visit.

Assuming the visitors make it inside they are obligated to abide, The Visiting Room Rules (short list): Appropriate apparel MUST be worn by ALL visitors. Provocative attire — too revealing, too short, or too tight is strictly prohibited. Shades of blue (color of prisoner's clothing), green (the color of corrections officers uniforms), and brown (the official color of dress for numerous civilian employees) are not to be worn by any visitors. Physical contact between visitors and inmates is restricted to a brief embrace, and/or kiss at the beginning and end of the visit. Visitors and prisoners utilizing the patio may hold hands. Tonguing and "fun" dling is absolutely, positively forbidden.

Currency is limited to a fifty-dollar maximum, preferably in singles, but not to exceed five-dollar denominations. Prisoners are not allowed to handle currency of any kind, and if observed doing so they will be issued a citation (CDCR 115) and have their visit terminated. Women visitors (or if it's your cup of tea, men) must carry transparent purses; men (or vice versa) money clips. Non-transparent purses, wallets, and currency exceeding five-dollar denomination MUST be kept/left inside vehicles in the visitor's parking lot...

"And what more shall I say? For time [and space] will fail me if I go on and relate about..." The infra red stamps all visitors (including children!) must receive on their right hands upon entering, and are compelled to present before being permitted to leave the visiting room; The mandatory submissions to searches of visitors, the mandatory strip and cavity searches of prisoners before entering and regressing the visiting area — which also applies to visitors if they are suspected of possessing contraband; the annoying and intrusive visiting room surveillance; the shockingly inflated food prices at the vending machines inside the visiting room. And finally, the enduring a plethora of other piquing inconveniences and indignities — which irony must completely baffle interloping prison officials. Because invariably, each weekend CSP visiting rooms overflow their capacity with loving, caring mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, and relatives and friends of prisoners.

Writing from a new address, Salinas Valley State Prison in Soledad, CA, we bring you a true Beat veteran. This week he sheds some light on us about the strenuous process of getting a visit. And then he also gives us letters from his family to him about their visits. We thought it was brilliant because it really gives people who don't know what it's like to be incarcerated a better understanding of how difficult it is to deal with such an awful situation. But in a place where you have to jump through hoops just to see your own family, this next writer still finds it in his heart to have a sense of humor. He sends us a funny little limerick to conclude the travesty of a visiting process in state prisons. We thank him for allowing us to get closer to him by introducing us to his family. Thank you for all you've shared...

Uncanny Situation

Mercedes 'noon day special' was delicious. But chili cheese con carne always seems to pass straight through me. Great, an empty stall, and surprisingly clean for a public restroom...

Shoot! It's already ten 'til one. I have to get up from here and hurry back to work...

On the way to the office I wondered why so many people kept staring and snickering. That is, until I walked by a store front window and saw in its reflection two feet of double-ply trailing from behind me...

Friendly Missives

Dear Ase:

Greetings. I pray all is well with you. My keepers have just now delivered your letter to me. Your words are always kind and encouraging and warm. You ask: "How did your visit go?" Honestly, I'd completely forgotten that in previous correspondence I had told you my sister was flying from Chi-town to Cali to see me. The visit went really well. Lolita (whom we affectionately call Big Sis) became extremely emotional when we met and literally soaked my shirt with her tears! We hadn't seen each other in over twelve years. It seemed like the entire visiting room understood and shared our joy — including the CO's. Sometimes they can be super-insensitive. Anyway, she told me "everybody" is doing fine, loves and misses me and are looking forward to my release. She wasn't supposed to say anything but my relatives are planning a 'surprise' BBQ to welcome me home.

While we're on the subject, I ate like a hog on steroids in that visiting room. The food was delicious despite being ridiculously high. But Big Sis said, "Don't trip," nor did I. In fact, I stuffed myself so full until they almost had to roll me outta there like a wheeled barrel. Around noon the sun began to smile brightly from a cloudless blue sky and they finally decided to open the patio.

Lolita and I were among the first group of visitors to go outside for a leisurely (and needed) stroll. We began a score of circuits o the courtyard welcoming a breeze that was pleasant, and with lively conversation, deftly bridging an informational gulf created by more than a decade's long absence.

The only conceivable low point was reached when I asked about our grandfather and she seemed to gloss over my inquiry. But the visit had gone so well that I decided not to press. Besides I'd already learned from another family member that Grand Daddy had been diagnosed with an irregular heartbeat and is being closely monitored by doctors.

My solemn prayer is that the stubborn-as-nails septuagenarian and I will once again sit together in the bleachers at Wrigley Field, savoring Chicago style deep-dish pizza, sipping suds and rooting for the hometown Cubs.

Regrettably it was too soon announced that "visiting hours are over." Lolita and I kissed, hugged and pledged our sibling love before being compelled to go our separate ways. How at that moment did I poignantly understand what William was saying...

They're releasing for rec yard so I'll close here and look forward to hearing from you soon. Your committed (in more ways than one) friend from across the pond.

Grand Daddy's Dairy (A Page There From)

Sunday Feb. 25th 20--: Day 56

"Mercy Jesus! Sure has been a long day me and my granddaughter just got back in town. Friday we flew to California to visit my Grandson... But when we made it to the prison, I told her to go inside to see your brother while I wait out here in the parking lot. Suddenly I was too overwhelmed with pain, anguish and bitter disappointment. I simply couldn't bear to see him like that: Behind bars, dressed in a zebra suit or however they dress 'em these days... Ray had so much going for himself, always been smart as a whip. Broke his moma's heart throwing away his life like he did. I believe that's what help send my Baby Girl to an early grave...

Lo' didn't mention to her brother that Grand Daddy was waiting outside which was probably best. She says — he looked good and is somehow supposed to come home next year. Well, I sure hope he does and has learned his lesson and will do good with the rest of his life. I'll help him anyway I can... Better get some rest, I gotta date with the cardiologist tomorrow — they gonna test the old ticker. I'll keep you posted.

Letter From My Sister

Hi Ray: I just got home from our visit. It made me feel so happy to see you again after all these years. I'm sorry I started to cry and spilled tears all on your baby blue prison pullovers, but they were joyful tears. You look so strong and handsome and I'm not saying that just because you're my brother — it's true. Don't get into trouble with any of those female guards I saw how that one at the desk kept smiling at you...

It took us almost seven hours to reach O'Hare Airport. We encountered some turbulence while flying over Colorado, they were experiencing a winter snowstorm but for the most part the flight was pretty smooth...

What a blessing it is that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned California sentencing law and you were able to get all those years knocked off your sentence. Me, Lawrence, Keith, Trice, Jaunice, Jasmine, Harold, Grand Daddy — Everybody! Is looking forward to you coming home next year. So please, please, don't do nothin' to jeopardize your freedom. Because you have a loving family that misses you very much and are waiting with open arms to welcome you home... It's close to mid-nite Chicago time and I have to get some rest because I got to go to work in the morning. Write me back (or call) as soon as you receive this letter and let me know how you're doing or if you need anything. Stay Up! Love, Your Big Sis, Lolita

Gone, But Not Forgotten

Evette Price — If I live to be 101, I won't forget her name or how she could inspire both awe and love in my heart. We couldn't have been more than five years old, but even back then Evette stood a half to a whole head taller than every student in Mrs. Lucas' kindergarten class — Except for me, and that nemesissable J.T.

I can still remember her glistening Shirley Temple curls, how they'd dance just above her shoulders as if the happiest adornments in the world. With enchanting eyes the hue of caramel, and a smile so bright and warm, it could well rival the sun. But the card read some twenty years later: "You are cordially invited to the wedding of: Evette Price and James T. Taylor."

Letter To The Editor

Dear Ed:

I am writing this letter in response to your Feb 26th, '07 published article, "To Pell or not to Pell." Wherein a rather peevisish reader writes: "...Didn't the citizens of the State of California and the legislature settle this issue ten years ago when Senate Bill 187, became the law of the land and effectively excluded convicted felons and such other reprobates from eligibility for government and tax payers dollars — i.e. Pell Grants, Student Education Opportunity Grants and similar student financial aid — that could, and in my view, rightly should be utilized for assisting law abiding and decidedly more deserving members of our society who struggle financially with their academic pursuits..."

Despite the fact that a decade ago the California Legislature, and by extension a significant number of citizens of California who voted in favor of SB-187, barred state prisoners from receiving student financial aid — the recent Resilient Argument-374 Initiative makes it clear that the issue is not "settled" for all Californians.

On the contrary. There exist legions of civil servants, judicial consultants, educators and progressive thinking humanitarians — like myself. Who, pure of heart and possessed foresight — can appreciate the wisdom in assisting not only our state's but the nations and the world's societally stigmatized, with developing their minds, acquiring communicative and life skills in preparation for the making of positive contributions for advancement into the twenty-first century.

Case in point. This Sunday past I went along with my aunt to visit her husband who is an inmate at Salinas Valley State Prison. While in the visiting room I witnessed one of the most artistically performed and emotionally charged public displays of affection that I can recall in my fifty years existence. Myself and two-hundred plus people sat in rapt silence as a rather handsome prisoner tenderly held the hand of his female companion (whom I mistakenly presumed was his wife) while reciting in mellifluous cadence a poem which, to my complete astonishment expressed enduring and warm sibling attachment.

Presently, the poem was concluded, the spell subsided and above a quiet chorus of "that was beautiful," and "he did that," and similar colloquial utterances of approval — the charming sister caressed her brother passionately and through a torrent of tears managed to say: "Where did you learn how to speak like that?" Barely restraining my own amazement I overheard the brother reply: "From Dr. Livingston. He's a professor of humanities at San Jose State University, who volunteers his time once a week teaching a creative writing and public speaking class here at the prison..."

Dr. Avery Livingston (it had to be him), and I have been friends and colleagues for more than twenty years. We first met in post graduate school back in the early '80's. But I digress... Tactfully, as circumstances would allow, I excused myself from aunt and uncle and made kindly introductions with Raymond P. and his sister Lolita. Among other things, I soon learned that she'd flown all the way from Chicago to visit her brother and as conversation developed it was confirmed that it was in fact my dear friend Ave who taught the prison creative writing/public speaking class.

How intimately and inextricably connected we humans are. Do I unabashedly resort to sentimentality to hammer home ideal-ology? You bet I do.

Patch of Ground

Once I am sanctioned
 In a stiffer area of the prison,
 It's not fault of mine
 The higher authority imposes that decision...

To prison officials we are nothing
 Except job security,
 We put food on the table
 And glue them ingenuity...

They live, breathe, and sleep
 This job becomes an emotion,
 They draw the line nowhere
 In their effort for promotion...

In this field there are examples
 But only a chosen few,
 They're decent folk
 Who always respect you...

But the overall majority
 Are scum of the earth,
 Who don't deserve a patch of ground
 To rest in peace within the dirt.

We haven't heard from this next writer in a cool minute. And we regret to inform you that he's now doing time in the security housing unit (SHU) in a California State Prison in Delano, CA. This week he hits us with a piece that really projects his courage and strength. For regardless what happens, he makes it clear that he will forever be the man that he is. And when you're a constant student of life, that isn't such a bad idea. His observations of himself and the world around him are filtered through the mind of a brilliant man. He perceives his situation with bold honesty and is intelligent enough to know what to take in and what to leave alone. He then concludes with a poem about how he feels about the police. And with the title, "Patch Of Dirt," it's pretty apparent how he feels. We can't knock him though because our system is supposed to make people come out better, but like he says in his first piece, "People in society should be aware that these places, this one in particular, will either bring out the best in an individual or ruin them entirely." We couldn't have put it better. Thank you...

MY PRISON COMIC STRIP™



7-22-07 www.mypersoncomicstrip.com

Remain My Character

I am locked in this cell twenty-four hours a day, but I still know my potentials, I still feel my strength, my mind is still my own, I know where my interest lies. Fortune must soon smile on me because sincere effort is always rewarded, nature allows no such imbalances as this.

What I am learning from this experience: Never again look for mercy, never again to expect or hope for justice, never to look for quarter without strings attached.

If the people I communicate with could live any part of my life for one week, past and present and see the things I see, feel the pain I feel, and die a little bit each day as I do, all their illusions and apparitions would vanish, when I need strength, I reach down within myself, I draw out the reserves I've built, the necessary endurance to take down my opposition. I call on myself, I have faith in myself, this is where mines always comes from in the end, myself.

All my life I'd had to work things out for myself, all my relatives are deceased, I've had help from no quarter, I've been alone now for a long time. This is why I've always had so much pain and trouble; I am in Pelican Bay State Prison's, security housing unit, illegally in prison and the SHU.

The attitude and methods that I have developed on my own have no reflection on anyone I correspond with, but on the nature of our life circumstances and situational pressures. After being illegally placed in the SHU I have taken all possibilities into account, in abundance. I have nothing going for me and any good or favorable turns of events will be only luck, good fortune. I don't mind not being liked by these racist police, I sincerely feel it is a tribute to my character they do not!

The four years I've been here, first in the SHU, then General Population, now back in the SHU. I have learned as much as I possibly could in this time, I have studied myself closely, I have studied people, inmates and convicts, wanting to know and understand.

I am given to understand that it is the strong who rule the weak but, in turn, the wise rule over the strong. What is happening to me here, what has happen, can never surprise or upset me again. My nerves have been fractured, my sensibilities outraged, for the last time. My outlook is clear and the future holds no more terror for me, just existing, life without sox, without meaning does not appeal to me at all.

No matter what happens, I would not like to leave my

bones here on the hill – if it is a choice between that and surrendering the things that make me a man, the things that allows me to hold my head erect and unbowed, then the hill can have my bones.

Most of the men back here live the crippled existence of the near-man, the half man. Well, I don't care how long I live, over this I have no control, but I do care about what kind of life I live, and I can control this. I may not live but another five minutes, but it will be five minutes definitely on my terms.

With my herniated disc I am forced to remain in my cell, no fresh air, no sun, twenty-four hours a day in here, it doesn't bother me though. I am training myself not to be disorganized by any measure they take against me, "every sickness ain't death, every good-bye ain't gone, and every big man ain't strong."

Day after day I've been trying to get a lot of work done, my mind is fast becoming clear and I am slowly harnessing my emotions, I can channel all my thoughts to important things, significant things. I'll stop writing this and then, come back to it another day.

I attempt to bend this experience to my benefit rather than let it weaken and destroy me as they would like. People in society should be aware that these places, this one in particular, will either bring out the best in an individual or ruin them entirely.

Wherever they send me, I try as hard as my character will allow to avoid all involvement in those situations that lead to trouble. But I can't promise myself nothing, the future holds no surprise for me.

I am surrounded here by fools, degenerates and phonies, I suffer a constant bombardment of nonsense from all sides. There is no rest from it even at night, twenty-four hours a day all my senses must endure the shock of this attack from the lunatic fringe. The days even the weeks, lapse one into the other, endlessly into one another.

At 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 in the morning some dummy bangs his cup on the walls, I insert my toilet paper earplugs and bury myself into sleep. Each day that comes and goes is exactly like the one that went before. I am forty seven now, time is on my side, and I'll be forty seven when I leave here, be it 20 years from now!

Perhaps if I could forget I could have some peace of mind, but I don't forget anything, wounds scar my mind much worse than they scar my body.

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All of my past life has been victimized by emotions, I have struggled mightily with myself these last couple of years in an attempt to erase all emotions, the only method that can succeed is the clinical approach, the analytical technique of treating my problems.

It is said and with some justification that the greatest battle is with oneself, so if I can gain a victory here the real work shouldn't be too hard. I have felt the sting of the knout and I live in the shadows of ovens, I've been the object of the severest ridicule.

Life has failed me, people I have had a right to expect something of, in the past, have failed me, and I have failed myself almost everyday, but I suffer no lasting effects from any of this because I derive my force and energy from no outside quarter. People's inability to understand and support me put me at a loss, but I must follow my mind, there is no turning back from awareness!

If I were to alter my step now I would always hate myself, I would grow older feeling that I had failed in the obligatory duty that is mine once I became aware. I would die as many have over centuries, without having lived.

I am concerned with living fully, living well, rather than living long, and since I have a measure of control over the former, and none whatever over the latter, this makes sense to me.

Being in prison is the most depressing time of my life, this is a time of my deepest desertion. This is how I feel all the time, no matter what my level of consciousness maybe asleep, awake, in between. The thing is there and it keeps me moving, pins my eyes to the ball, up tight 24-hours a day.

The guards who retaliated against me filed false reports, are everyone's enemy, they cannot be appeased, they are relentless calloused beyond repair, heedless to anyone's human suffering, they lie, pretend, defend their actions and collaboration. By and large some of these police are fools, emotional half-wits, petty power motivates their every action.

I try to like people, good people, I use to find it hard to really hate people. I loved them, I understand from the beginning that the end purpose of life was simply to live, experience, contribute, connect, to gratify the body and mind.

I began to hate when I discovered that the mystification was intersected intentionally, I can't say where it started, I can't trace it, but I believe it goes back to my early years. Sisters Of Charity is a convent in Culver City, CA. I had a friend there in 1994-1995, I mean the feeling that what she accepted as right wasn't necessarily so I'd say to Katheen, here, the police, the court, I resisted them all.

I've been a brigand all my life, it was all the 27 years plus in prison, with the time and opportunity available to me for research and thought that motivated a desire to remain my character.

I think that if I had been on the streets, those 27 plus years instead of in and out of prison, with a father I never had, I'd have been in the mainstream of society.

This isn't a I hate a ninja thing, but it has it's racial implications, what's up is me, I don't find that at all uncomfortable because I have some prerogatives, people who come through this SHU are genuinely sick in one way or the other, totally disorganized, twisted, disgusting epitomes of the men here before them.

Those who aren't so upon their arrival will surely so when they leave, no one escapes unscathed. Most guys leave their individuality and any pride they had, behind these walls.

Police work here to feed upon the convict. For two reasons really, the first half because they can do no other work, frustrated men and women soon to develop sadistic mannerisms! And the second half, sadist out front, suffering under the restraints placed upon them by an equally sadistic/vindictive society.

When they walk through the compound gates, their whole posture goes through a total metamorphosis, inflict pain, satisfy the power complex, and get a check. I can't see how the sick can administer to the sick.

My mother, Lola M. Scott, may she rest in peace, I loved this Black/Indian woman and when I use the word "love" I am not making an attempt at rhetoric. I am attempting to express a refulgent, unrestrained emanation from the deepest most durable region of my soul, but an unshakable thing I have never questioned.

CHRIS GRAJEDA

Our young brother Chris is always a great read and this week certainly isn't any different. For those of you who don't know how we met him, let us tell you. We met him in Alameda County Juvenile Hall and then he got out and worked with us in our office for a brief minute before going back to the system. Now he's becoming more wise in his age (he's still our young brother) and you can see it seeping from his pores. He writes his take on what life is and then basically concludes by saying life is what you make it. Then he writes a beautiful poem to his grandmother who were assuming passed away. Though our hearts go out to him for his loss, we know her strength, love and memory will live on through him. He's writing from the Deuel Vocational Institute in Tracy, CA. You always have a place here, Chris, in case you don't already know...

In Love And Memory

In love and memory,
of the sweetest person ever known:
one that I loved with my life,
and in an instant would give my own:

In love and memory,
Of my personal angel and my heart:
The one that I've cherished,
Right from the start:

In love and memory,
Of my shining star and my sun:
The one I proudly take the title,
As your loving Grandson!!

Rest in peace my love,
Elsie M. Thompson

*In love and memory,
of the sweetest person ever known:
one that I loved with my life,
and in an instant would give my own:*

Life

Life...

It's full of family, friends, boy and girlfriends, wives and husbands.

Life... Full of likes and dislikes, pain, pleasure, anguish and contentment.

Life...

It's full of haters, playas, J-cats, thugs, hustler, gangstas, and businessmen.

Life... It's full of prisons and schools, chances and no chances.

Life...

It's full of laws and lawbreakers, freedom and confinement.

Life, its full of a lot of things, you could prosper or you could fall. But no matter how hard you think about it, life will eventually end in death. So it's a matter of what you do while you're still alive and breathing. It's up to you to leave your mark on this world, whether its good or bad. So ask yourself this... What's your life going to turn out to be? Think about it!

I Have A Dream

I have a dream
 That one sweet day
 prisoners will awaken
 and see...

That the dream of the Quakers
 Is now but a shell
 Horrible transmogrified
 Into a living hell...

Slavery is back
 In full force,
 Satan's army galloping as he rides
 astride
 An awful dark horse...

Humans exploited
 All for material gain
 Piglets caring not
 For causing heartache
 And pain...

Make 'em work for pennies
 steal the sweat of their brows
 more money, money, money
 for just us
 as we gorge at the
 pork barrel trough..."

Over two million now
 about four times as many
 as just a quarter century past...

Warm bodies locked in cages

Famous for his most recent fiction story, "George Goes To Jail," where he pokes fun at the thought of our president doing some time. This week he takes us on a journey through his thought (which are great) with two poems, both more than worth reading. Speaking of reading his first, "What Is A Writer?" clearly blueprints the relationship between writer and reader. He personifies that relationship by calling it a dance and in that dance the writer is the lead. A very understandable metaphor that we thought was very creative. Then, his second poem, "I Have A Dream," lists the ills of an incarcerated experience and what it means to a selfish and greedy society in general. However, his dream puts more of the responsibility on the people who are suffering from this flawed system as he ends the poem with, "Yes, I have a dream that one sweet day prisoners, nationwide will awaken and ask: When, oh when will we show solidarity? And why do we continue to cooperate, with our own destruction?" Those are great questions to suggest we ask ourselves. We wonder what answers he came up with. He's writing from the Marion Correctional Institution in Marion, North Carolina.

Just so a cruel "industry"
 Can thrive...

Humans now "commodified"
 Merely chattel
 As callous fat-rats
 Trade bonds and stocks
 Based on broken bones
 And scars and misery
 on Wall Street.

Feed 'em swill
 take their dignity and pride
 labeling them 'criminals'
 is a convenient excuse
 behind which we can hide..."

As we make 'em labor
 hold 'em in bondage and servitude
 as we encourage them to
 amongst themselves, mindlessly
 feud...

That way the sheep won't notice
 how they're bein' cruelly sheared

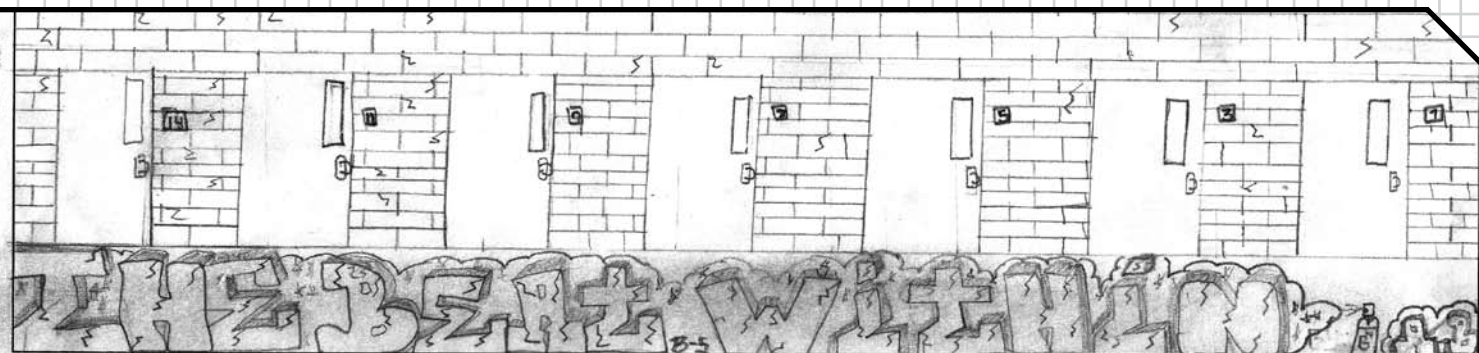
while we steal and extort billions
 by exploiting the public's fears...

Corrections Corporation of America
 How chillingly Orwellian...

Lets use our largesse
 to pocket us a few
 more politicians
 they can posture
 about how tough-on-crime
 they are
 and get more votes
 while we'll get more
 business...

Yes, I have a dream
 That one sweet day
 Prisoners, nationwide
 Will awaken
 And ask:

When, oh when
 will we show
 solidarity?



What Is A Writer?

A writer is,
 In a sense,
 The lead dance partner

It takes two to tango
 and the writer merely
 provides
 the "blueprint"

A catalyst,
 For the imaginations
 Of her myriad partners

To journey to lands,

Where they've never been
 And see sights,
 They've never beheld
 And meet "characters,"
 They shall never forget...

Writer and reader,
 The yin and the yang
 Locked together
 Forever
 In the eternal circle
 The beneficent ballroom
 Of two minds
 Ceaselessly, and wondrously,
 Dancing...

I Want To Guide You

I want to guide you. I want to stand by you.
 I want to guide you into my heart.
 I want to love you right from the start.
 I want to guide you into my mind, so you could know
 Michael will never leave you behind.
 I want to guide you deep into my soul, so I cannot lose
 control.
 I want to guide you into my feeling,
 So you can know how I feel about you.
 And help ease my pains, and take my tears away.
 And love me for me in a right way.
 I want to guide you with what is all-good,
 So down the line nothing about the way I guide you
 would be misunderstood.
 Want to guide you in a way that would be fair,
 So you would know I do care.
 I want to guide you into the best of my emotion,
 And the best of my affection,
 And surround you with all of my protection.
 I want to guide you with my special touch forever.
 And nothing in the world could keep us from being
 together.

You Are My World

When we first met, I knew right from the start you was
 something special in this world.
 And now you have become something very special in my
 world.
 And you mean the world to me.
 And I want to mean the world to you.
 And in our world we will make each other dream come
 true.
 You are the world I have searched to find.
 And your heart, soul and mind will forever be mine.
 You are my world that turns and makes my heart burn
 for you love. And your kiss that makes me feel from up
 above.
 Cause you are my world that's full of doves.
 You are my world cause in you I have found the greatest
 love of all.
 And your love has been my wake up call.
 And I will never take another downfall
 And you are the world that I hold in my hand as tight as
 I can.
 You are my world.

Love On The Run

Love is not fun, when it's on the run.
 When you love seem to be so close, but yet so far away.
 Cause I am back to missing you each and every day.
 You is something I strive to catch up with,
 Nut now your love is on the run, away from my strong
 test.
 Keeping me from sharing with you my best.
 So together we could rest.
 So turn that love of yours back around,
 So your heart can be found,
 And together we could get this love life off the ground.
 Cause I just can't think right when you are not around.

When Michael writes us he usually sends us a five poem minimum and this week is no different. Although, we really enjoy his presence in our pages, we want to take this time and use it as an opportunity to let you know how WE truly feel about love poems. We understand that during this time of isolation, our thoughts mostly roam to the intimacy of having a partner. However, we feel like The Beat Without should be used to teach one another and that love poems should be sent to your loves. It's not to say we don't enjoy a good romance poem or two, but we do understand that most of the time when you dig deep down into the matter it's usually about the fire that goes on in our loins after being forced to be abstinent for so long. But the real reason we aren't that excited by romance poems is because now is a time where all we have control over are ourselves. And in the end, if we aren't right with ourselves, our loved ones won't be right with us either. Hey, there's a good idea for a poem, a love poem to one's self. Well, anyhow, just a minute concern about love poems, you don't have to stop writing them if you don't want to, but what we'd really like to know is more about you. He's writing from Florida State Prison in Raiford, Florida.

Foundation

My life needs a foundation. Without a strong foundation things in my life would not hold up. I have struggled with building a foundation in my life, which I have struggled with time after time. Cause there was no foundation in my life. And this foundation was a big key to balancing out my life. And any other life.

And without knowledge of knowing how and where to start building this foundation in my own life. Failure had struck into my life over and over. Making me unsuccessful in just about everything I did. But I never gave up right there. I kept on striving. Cause in my heart I knew if there was a will there had to be a way. But I was missing the key to that way. But it took many years of experience and learning the hard way. Before my eyes started to opening up to the fact of knowing that I needed a foundation in my life.

Failure had struck into my life over and over. Making me unsuccessful in just about everything I did. But I never gave up. . .

One Thing Brings About Another

One thought brings about another thought.
 One stand brings about another stand.
 One hand helps the other hand.
 One man instills courage in another man.
 In the struggles we are there for each other.
 Just as one brother would be for another brother.
 One struggles brings about another struggle.
 One warrior brings about another warrior.
 One leader brings about another leader.
 Some love brings about more love.
 One good deed brings about another good deed.
 One kind act brings about another kind act.
 Respect for self brings about respect for others
 Striving to be better brings about more betterment.
 Some unity brings about more unity.
 One community brings about the building of another
 community.
 One peace of mind, brings about peace to other minds.

Life Gambles

Life gamblers you are bound to greet
Like illegal conduct on the starts thinking yourself discreet
Certain life gambles you'll meet
While life gambling is no treat
Hormones at their peak, trying to reach high
Off of any substance you can find
Engaging in unprotected sex
Carefree about what comes next
Contracting disease a sure bet
oppressing others with gambling debts
Life gambling like raging fire
Mends engulfed with position wealth and power
Solely for selfish desire
Life gambling in due time
ensures the manifestation of convictions in crime
Life gambling law makers staging war
For all of those unaware of what and who they're fighting for
Senseless, life gambling of the various, kinds
The type of life gamblers we need to defy
Life Gambling is extremely hectic
Especially being specifically unconnected
With the essence of oneself
Despite the realities of everyone else
Life gambling we just can't pretend, like airplanes in the sky
Ships out at sea, NASA in space and women giving birth
In the delivery there aspects of life gambling
We must depend on our Creator as master and friend
Realizing life gambling is like placing a life's bet
Unlike slots, poker, or roulette
These life gambling techniques, you'll ultimately regret
For gambling is truly a sin
One in which you have no chance to win
Be smart and erase this mind setting trend
Life gambling has nothing to offer, our children women or me
Besides the life gambles in God
Whom we should trust and depend
Lets stop life gambles!

Searching

Searching for so many years
Through sweat, pain and multiple tears
Not withstanding the urgency of god's fear

Searching from the very start... just to be a part
Of my own life... may be found on a milk cart... MISSING

I have been... still searching to begin... to be different...
to win
Searching to redefine... life offers... my bind

Searching blindly, but cannot see... originality, as
life should be relinquishing mind, body and soul to
something upcoming... untold
but here I am still searching for me
Desperately trying to understand... the essence of man
Why the forces of evil... continue to tremble down upon me
Even offering to unite with me... constantly whispering,
to a degree
low fortunate I should be... but thank god
For the ability to search life through
This evil wickedness... describes you
Satan the devil... I want no parts of you
Although I'm still searching it's not about you

I am searching for my life anew!

This next writer is a very wise one and you'll see why we say that when you continue reading. He writes about everything from his visions of freedom to life's gambles. But what we really like is his poem about domestic violence. Not too many people speak on domestic violence because it's a real sensitive subject. But he speaks about it in great detail. He's writing from the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania.



Visions Of Freedom

Visions of freedom... requires the essence of man
To continue a plan... against an idealistic stance

Visions of freedom... is accepting diversity
Understanding creativity... as we were created to be

Visions of freedom... the blind can see
Only if we open up... to our intellectuality
And become intoned with our spirituality and rise above
Life negativities

Visions of freedom... is the ability to revolutionize the
problem we've accepted
And uphold our stance on those we've rejected
Not trying to be equal or sequels of life

Visions of freedom... can be strife... by dreams not
perfected
Or visions of freedom... to be subjected
Unlike the dreams of being optimistic... while

Visions of freedom... to integrate or either separate
Are visions that defy... are ability to magnify
The origin of man and purpose his drive
To worship the oneness of god
In unity... with peace, love and harmony

Visions of freedom... without technicalities
Giving rise for reasons to rally... being done with
multiple follies

Visions of freedom... we can achieve... if we only
concede to believe that man's purpose in life... has been
misunderstood
And unless he bows down... and lives life as he should
Certain visions of freedom... will do us no good!

Domestically You

Here she lays beneath you, ever claiming to be unfaithful
unto you
Yet she never received her respect due
Why? Domestic violence – defines
Domestically you
How could you love her, her face and body, all black and
blue
Children running and crying scared to death of you
And the shameful acts you would do
Domestic violence, it's true
Just disgusting by being domestically you
But what I don't understand, knowing this to be true
How this some women never failed yo
Consistently there, no matter what you do
All about being, domestically you
But what I don't understand, knowing this to be true
How this same woman never failed you
Consistently there, no matter what you do
All about being domestically you
But here's a story for all women subjected to your
uncommon glory
We refuse to continue to carry these scars of a woman's
story
No pride, no hope, no chance of understanding your glory
So tired of your years of abuse, no excuse
Apologies not accepted, so called love rejected
Ineffective like a judge issuing a protective order
Restraining you from me in violation you continue to be

Domestically you keep following me, still finding
myself not free Prayer's this shelter for bothered
women will protect me
From committing the ultimate act against Domestically
you or me
A support system of true human beings
Supporting each other, mostly young mothers
Just trying to escape the unnecessary abuse
I hope you wouldn't inflict upon your own mother
With your ferocious attacks continued abuse, back to
back
Physical mental and emotional as well, so now how does
it feel to live in a hell
Being domestically you, without me, no longer your prey
For now I'm free, from living life blue in the company of
Domestically you...
Never again shall I worry about being protected from you
As I start I've perfected forgiveness in the heart
Silent I shall no longer be.
From the Domestic violence you've perpetrated upon me
This forgiveness not about you, but about all women
Who have been victimized by, Domestically you
To have patience and faith in the Creator
In order to see, how much life is greater
No longer in silence as a victim of your Domestic Violence
So for all women who remain faithful and true
Live life as you do without the likes of another,
Domestically you.

Hiding In The Shadows

I always wait for the sundown to fall at its own pace
And the old bright moon to shift, it's almost like a race
Stop spotlighting my pitch black form,
I love the dark, no wait, maybe I don't
These narcotics have me movin' too fast like the ocean's
ridges
Me and my G's shadows always exposed under the noisy
graffiti infested bridges
At our popular hangout spots, everything is dark
I'm baffled the bible says something
About the blind leading the blind
Dealing kilos I really am hiding in the shadows
I give, but then change up like Christmas grinch
Doin' the balancing act on wooden crutches
I don't even glow in the dark, the glow would make me
wise
Gangster's with Betty Davis eyes
Hiding in the shadows
These pitch black shadows
Like a cracked tooth
Trying to shake loose from this dark booth
I'm talking about the distance, sun from the moon
Hot from the cold, lion from the deer
A gangster from his gear
Stepping in the shadows of ghouls and goblins
It's a natural progression for G's to pat you on your
shoulders
Then out of the shadows comes the thundering
Rolling boulders
Smashing away
Welcome to that day!

ALEX SHELTON

This next writer is an artist in so many more ways than one. We first got introduced to him through his outstanding artwork (if you'd like to see some more of his artwork, check out last issue's cover), but now with every piece of visual art he sends us, he also sends literary art. His poetry is amazing as he usually talks about his life as a gangster and what he's doing now to redeem himself. Still a "G" in many ways, but now one that teaches, Alex always uncovers new ways of thinking for us, so we know he'll do the same for you. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA.

Crazy

Crazy G's sending those Mr. Dynamics a little crazy
Tumbling tail over teacups to pinpoint all that needs
Saying and all has been said
Your correspondence is a multi-channel system that's
blinking red
Exchanging blank screens
Tighten up your seams
And terminate this crazy game of chicken, stand alone,
I can hear the moan and the tone
Respect yourself, you are a temple of God
Stop guzzling everyday, getting chin checked
An undercover S.N.Y. your defense is Folsom Karate
Not in my "G" city you'll get decked
Gangsters will eat you up for lunch, you're the cook
So slice up some more bologna,
You say you're into slicing,
You have the nerve to talk about pride
you stop off at Winchell's cause you like
your donut glazed
Nothing plain
your the grandmaster of body language, real amazed
your a little crazy joke
We'll catch up later "okey-doke"

Life, its full of a lot of things, you could prosper or you could fall. But no matter how hard you think about it, life will eventually end in death. So it's a matter of what you do while you're still alive and breathing. It's up to you to leave your mark on this world, whether its good or bad. So ask yourself this... What's your life going to turn out to be? Think about it!

read the rest of Chris Grajeda's BWO piece on page 67

